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the Atlantic

DECEMBER 2008 THEATLANTIC.COM

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of an
Ultimate
Fighter

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**AFTER
THE
CRASH**

**CHINA TO THE U.S.:
SHAPE UP—OR ELSE**

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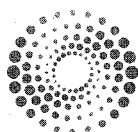
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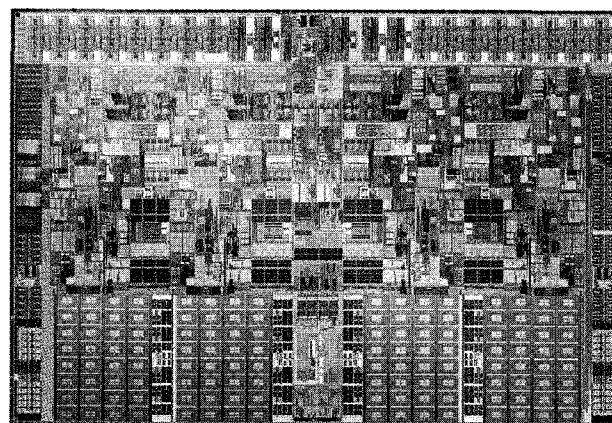
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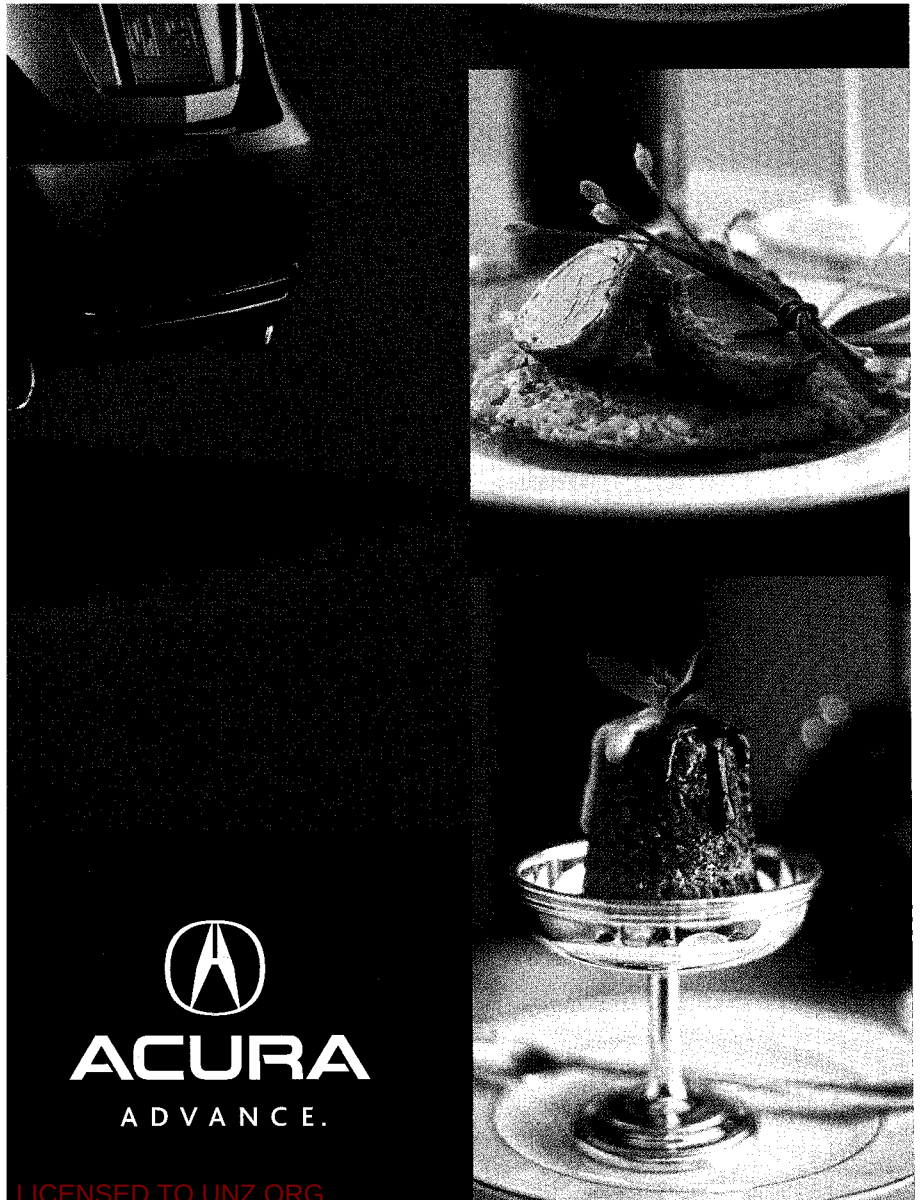
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CONTENTS

DEPARTMENTS

14...EDITOR'S NOTE

16...LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

21...QUICK STUDY

Elitist endowments;
borrowing blind

GALLERY

32...Dream

By Harry Bliss

55...Hope

By Laurie Rosenwald

77...Now on Sale!

By Peter Arkle

90...Doped to Dow

By Istvan Banyai

98...Misfortune Cookie

By Yuko Shimizu

POETRY

56...Buoyancy

By Tom Sleigh

78...Inflection

By Christina Pugh

132...IN A WORD

Articles of agreement;
dishwasher dictators
By Barbara Wallraff

134...WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?

Tropical print is dead,
and other advice
By Jeffrey Goldberg

Cover photograph
by Spencer Platt/
Getty Images



Istanbul rivals in majesty anything implied by Versailles or the Forbidden City, page 36.

Dispatches

24...Spooked

The spies who loved me
By Joshua Kucera

25...Caveat Donor

A street brawl in India brings down
a global kidney-transplant ring.
By Yudhijit Bhattacharjee

30...A Cock Crows in Portland

The heartbreak of urban chicken
husbandry
By Inara Verzemnieks

31...Exile

After 17 years in the NHL, Czech
hockey star Jaromir Jagr hits the
ice—and the jackpot—in Siberia.
By Jeffrey Tayler

FOOD

34...Cheese Balls

Mozzarella's American renaissance
By Corby Kummer

TRAVEL

36...The Ottoman Mystique

In Turkey, there are dancers, and
there are dancers.
By James Fallows

TECHNOLOGY

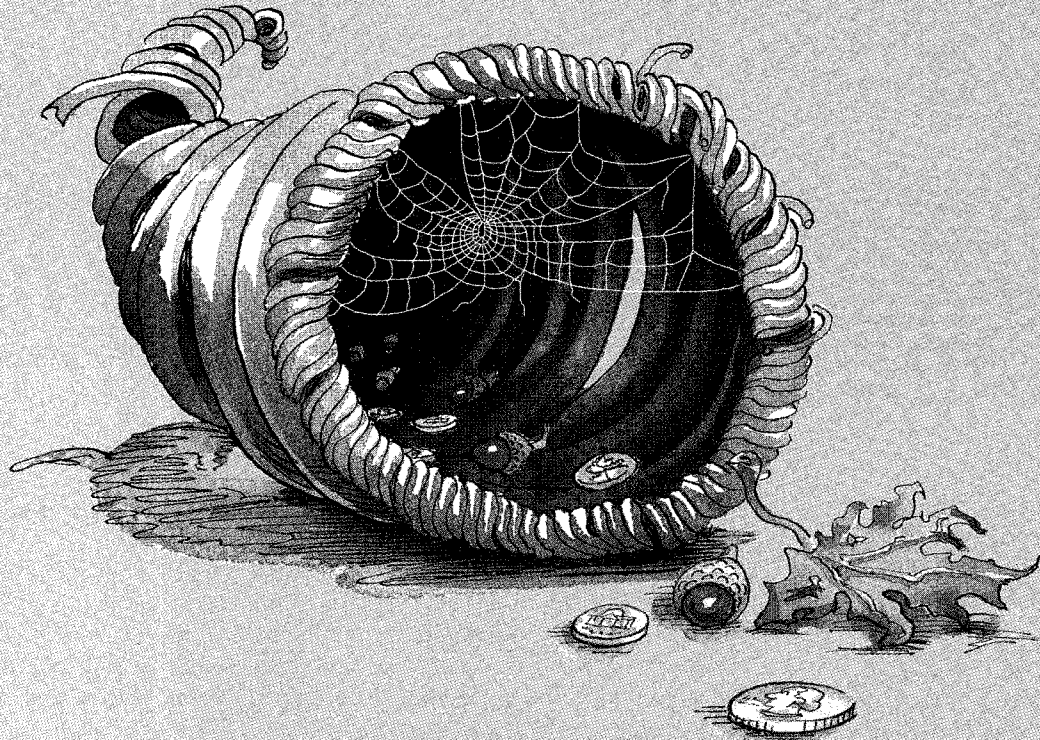
38...Rook Dreams

New chess software makes it easier
for younger players to reach the top
of the game—and harder to stay there.
By Edward Tenner

Last year Americans spent 19 hours planning for their retirement.



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CONTENTS



Jim Carrey's latest goofball parable shows why he's Hollywood's go-to guy for high-concept metaphysics, page 44.

Columns

COMMERCE AND CULTURE

40...Pop Psychology

Asset bubbles are a part of the human condition—and they can't be cured by regulation.

By Virginia Postrel

MOVING PICTURES

44...The Existential Clown

Why Jim Carrey makes us uncomfortable

By James Parker

Books

EDITOR'S CHOICE

105...Geography Is Destiny

An epochal new book argues that the events of history we think consequential and monumental are, mostly, trivia.

By Benjamin Schwarz

106...Books of the Year

The best of 2008

108...What Girls Want

A series of vampire novels illuminates the complexities of female adolescent desire.

By Caitlin Flanagan

122...Suburbs of Our Discontent

Misery and banality in a 1950s Connecticut development—rendered with anatomical precision on the page, and now coming to the screen

By Christopher Hitchens

130...Cover to Cover

Smack and the city; Merrie Olde Motowne; accidental authoritarians; the great feather frenzy; and more

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THEATLANTIC.COM



VIDEO Fair Play

Former NFL chief Paul Tagliabue and former senator George Mitchell discuss scandals, triumphs, and the future of pro sports.



ARCHIVE Depression Regression

Atlantic articles from the 1930s reveal a nation near collapse, and an all-too-familiar financial landscape.



INTERVIEW Heart of a Samurai

David Samuels talks about spending time with one of *Ultimate Fighting*'s most vicious, and haunted, practitioners.



VIDEO Fears of a Clown

James Parker dissects a few of Jim Carrey's most unnervingly subversive onscreen moments.



SLIDESHOW Among the Turks

James Fallows narrates a photo tour of the mosques, markets, and ancient ruins he encountered in Istanbul.

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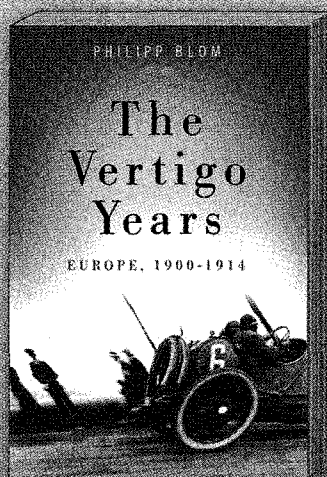
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A WORLD RACING TO THE BRINK



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— *Booklist* (Starred review)

"This is a stylish, erudite guide to an age of exhilaration and anxiety that in many ways invented our own."
— *Publishers Weekly*

"In this masterful presentation, the time in question is so richly laced with scientific bedazzlement, social ferment, and cultural churning that a sense of giddy misadventure begins to feel strangely familiar."
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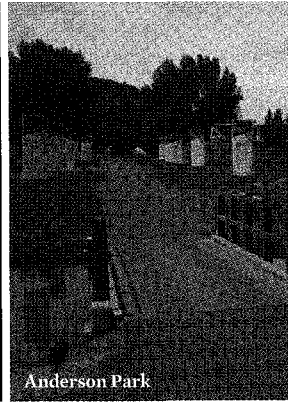
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Sandra Day O'Connor

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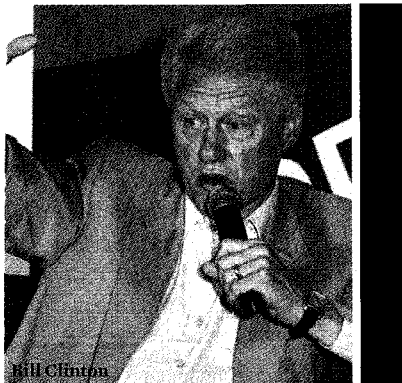
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Jamie Dimon with Charlie Rose



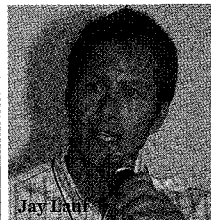
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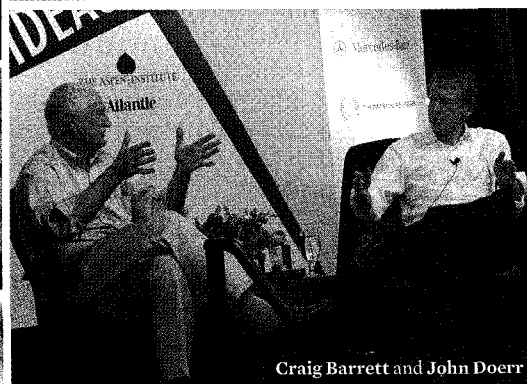
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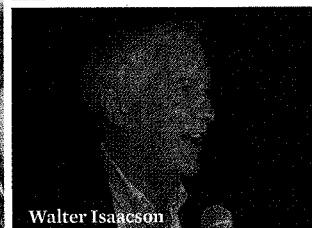
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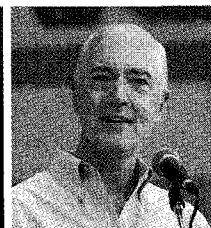
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Walter Isaacson



EDITOR'S NOTE



American Precedent

THE MONEY-WORLD FEELS generally as if it had taken an overdose of persimmons,” *The Atlantic* reported in its first issue, condemning the leveraged speculation that led to the financial crisis of 1857. For those readers who had never wolfed down too many persimmons, the magazine helpfully elaborated:

The bowels of the banks, with us the great money-lenders, close with the snap and tenacity of steel-traps; and then a general panic, or want of commercial confidence, brings on a paralysis of the domestic exchanges, and wide-spread bankruptcy and ruin.

Sound familiar (if kind of gross)?

In 1930, *The Atlantic* described how, before the bubble burst in 1929, brokers recklessly let investors borrow against the inflated value of their stocks, to invest further on the assumption the market would keep rising. (Our writer noted that bankers would never, of course, indulge such lax standards when it came to something as “solemnly contracted” as home mortgages.) Then, a year later, we followed up with a broader indictment of the “whirlwinds of speculation,” detailing how, in the ’20s, Americans had talked themselves into believing that what went up would keep going up, that

fundamental economic changes meant that earnings would “expand miraculously, without rest or interruption,” and that the supposed scarcity of real estate and assorted commodities meant that their prices would always rise. As our writer, Samuel Spring, explained, “Slowly, optimistically, we tend to accept, as the master index of value, the price at which the unit of speculation can be resold to other speculators.”

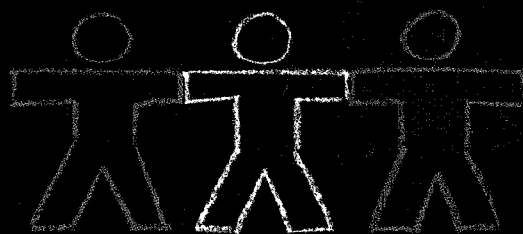
Well. Our archive provided pretty cold comfort this fall as the collapsing housing market knocked the supports from under the stock exchanges and began undermining the broader economy. It didn’t help much, as I averted my eyes from my own shriveling 401(k), to be reminded that James Fallows had predicted much of this in his cover story “Countdown to a Meltdown” three years ago. Besides, the looping tracks of the march of financial folly could be seen clearly in our own pages. It was *The Atlantic* that published “Dow 36,000,” which argued that fundamental economic changes meant that stocks could “double, triple, or even quadruple tomorrow and still not be too high.” That story ran in 1999, about six months before the dot-com bubble burst.

I called an old friend, Henry Blodget, to ask the question that was vexing me personally and professionally: Why don’t we ever learn? Why do even those who are paid to learn from financial history—the financial professionals—seem doomed to repeat it? Blodget’s answer, drawn from his own brutal

experience with the tech bubble and his subsequent adventure with the real-estate one, begins on page 50. Also in this issue, Virginia Postrel describes experiments that have persuaded economic theorists that bubbles are inevitable, as each of us bets on selling to an even greater fool. And Fallows conveys some bracing advice from Gao Xiqing, the man charged with investing part of China’s dollar hoard. Complex instruments like derivatives, Gao says, “are crap,” the excretion of a society that overpays its financial professionals and “distorts the talents of the country.” He actually sounds a lot like Spring, who wrote in 1931 that “an investment banker, if he desires to continue selling, cannot forget his securities as soon as he gets them out of the door.”

It all boils down to a fairly grim account of human progress, no? After all these years of intensifying financial sophistication, we still can’t restrain ourselves from gorging on persimmons. The thing is, though, that the financial meltdown wasn’t the only story this fall, just as it was not our only preoccupation in 1857. This magazine was founded to promote the radical proposition that in America, white people should not treat black people as property. Last month, Americans elected a black man as their president. So maybe history does not move in a circle after all, and, however faltering our steps at times, however clumsy we feel, the path does tend upward.

—James Bennet



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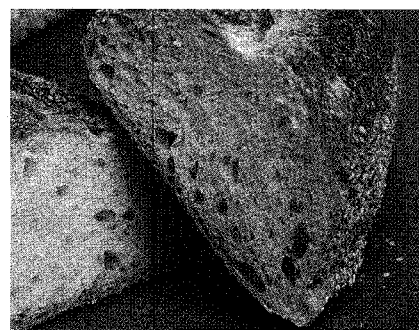
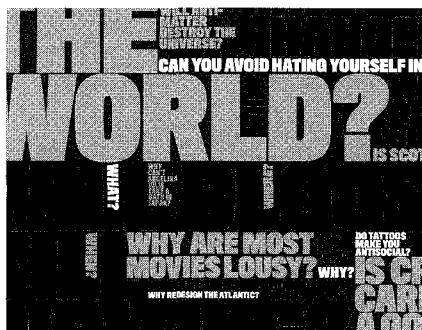
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



THINK AGAIN

As a reader of *The Atlantic* on and off for 40 years, I have to say that your new look is making William Dean Howells turn miserably in his celestial resting place (perhaps as Harold Ross roiled when Tina Brown rampaged at *The New Yorker*), to say nothing of his literary colleagues of the 1870s who were trying to hold off the ascendancy of New York and the Jamesians as the center of letters in the country.

You look like a cross between *Time* and *The Economist*. Amid your lunging social and political reportage, you severely neglect literature and the arts, save for those shabby paragraphs of sanitized authors and titles in the back. I know you will not dare to publish this, fearing to offend what H. L. Mencken called the “great booboisie” of readers.

DAVID TAYLOR JOHANNESEN
SOUTH DARTMOUTH, MASS.

Could it be that all it took was a stunning new wrapper to transform an indisputably excellent magazine into one that instantly strides to the head of the class? Or, alternatively, has *The Atlantic* been so skillfully retuned from the inside out that the changes ever so slightly shift the book’s emphasis and sensibility?

Having thought about it, I conclude, happily, that both are true: every element and detail of your redesign is “just right.” A venerable old title is once again a brilliant monthly gift to readers

who appreciate being challenged at every turn.

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SPOUSAL INFIDELITY?

Ross Douthat (“Is Pornography Adultery?,” October *Atlantic*) writes, “The man who uses porn is cheating sexually, but he isn’t involving himself in an emotional relationship.” Does that make my wife’s romance novels—in which the heroine meets and falls in love with a handsome sea captain with a Ph.D. in marine biology just back from Far Tortuga, where he was saving whales and attempting to get over the tragic loss of his wife, who died trying to climb K2 to raise money for the Special Olympics—better or worse

than anything I might see on PhatFarm Girlz.com? She’s also cheating sexually, and she is involving herself emotionally—vicariously falling in love—with a fantasy male I can’t compete with (except for the perfect pecs and the cleft chin, anyway). Why is it that Mr. Douthat’s outrage is aimed only at men?

JEFF RAINES
OAKLAND, CALIF.

NEW YORK LEGEND

Jed Perl’s article (“The Man Who Remade the Met,” October *Atlantic*) pays due tribute to Metropolitan Museum of Art Director Philippe de Montebello and raises several interesting points about museums today. However, one sentence is damaging, indeed

downright wrong: “The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, one of the greatest in the country, has drastically cut curatorial departments and positions.”

Under the leadership of Malcolm Rogers, the museum has expanded both its curatorial and conservation departments. In fact, during the past eight years, curatorial positions have grown from 62 to 77 (a 24 percent increase), and conservation positions have grown from 46 to 69 (a 50 percent increase).

By investing in the curatorial and conservation departments, Rogers has demonstrated his commitment to ensuring that the museum’s collection receives the care, scholarship, and accessibility it deserves.

KATIE GETCHELL
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON
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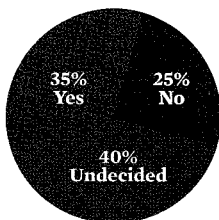
Jed Perl replies:

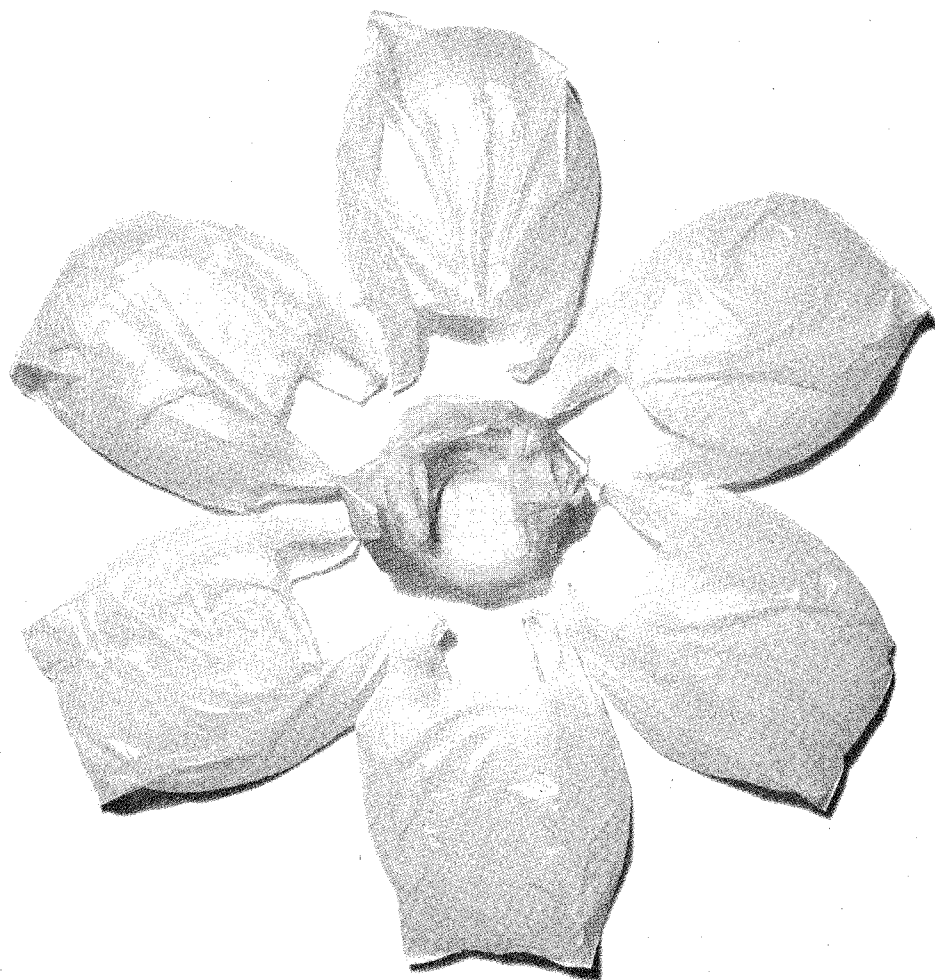
Numbers tell only part of the story. Anybody familiar with the recent history of the museum knows perfectly well what I am referring to. In the summer of 1999, Malcolm Rogers—to quote from *The Wall Street Journal*—“put into effect a re-organization so radical in conception and so heavy-handed in its implementation that some have dubbed it ‘The Boston Massacre’ ... When the dust settled, eighteen longtime employees were gone and departments had merged into superdivisions responsible for immense tracts of cultural terrain.” Among those fired were Jonathan Fairbanks, who had founded the American decorative arts department, and Anne Poulet, head of European decorative arts, who went on to be director of the Frick Collection, in New York. At the time, the firings and reorganization were

JOHN GUNEO; CARLA ESCOE

Log

Here’s how letter writers responding to Ross Douthat’s October article answered the question, *Is pornography adultery?*





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met by a storm of protest that prompted the museum's chairman to say, "I understand why people feel strongly." As for the aftermath, Getchell may see net gains, but many see net losses.

GIVING WIND A CHANCE

Matthew Quirk's article about wind power ("Blowback," October *Atlantic*) begs some clarifications. It is not necessary to install lots of new backup generation when large blocks of wind generation are added to the grid. Wind power is only a fraction of the total generation in any particular part of the country, and its variability typically falls within the margins of the existing operating reserves utility systems maintain. Thus, it is usually possible to add a significant amount of wind power without causing any increase in the use of reserves. Also, wind's variability is largely forecastable.

The article states that "an unexpected cold front" suddenly reduced the output of wind plants in Texas last February, causing a series of power-supply problems. The changes in wind conditions that day were accurately forecasted by the new centralized forecasting system (operated by my firm) established by the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT). Because the system was still in its pilot mode that day, ERCOT chose not to use the forecast. The state's power shortfall was actually triggered by the failure of a conventional gas plant to come on line and not by the drop-off in winds.

BRUCE H. BAILEY
PRESIDENT/CEO, AWS TRUEWIND, LLC
ALBANY, N.Y.

Matthew Quirk replies:

Wind power does require backup. The question is how much. I went with the conclusions of the grid operators themselves. At the end of the day, they're the ones responsible for making sure

the lights don't go out. For wind to add capacity to a system and reliably meet demand, every 100 megawatts of wind power typically requires 85 or more megawatts of backup. In Texas, that figure is 91 megawatts.

Better forecasting will greatly help compensate for wind's variability. The emergency in Texas was due to a drop in wind and a failure of reserves (this is the official explanation from ERCOT). My larger point still holds: wind, even in small proportions, can gum up the system, and sanguine assumptions that current backup can accommodate lots of new wind power without incident are not borne out by facts on the ground.

BAKING EVEN

The legal concept that is conspicuously missing from Corby Kummer's article ("Half a Loaf," October *Atlantic*) is that of a trade secret, something that

is not protected under copyright, patent, or trademark but that has proprietary commercial value if exploited without competing use. As the name implies, a trade secret is valuable only if the details are, in fact, kept secret. Perhaps Jim Lahey didn't seek counsel before he cooperated in the publication of a *New York Times* article about his "revolutionary bread-making method," but

having done so, the proverbial cat was out of the bag. What did he expect, that readers would pay him a royalty out of the goodness of their hearts? Many wiser (if less altruistic) chefs guard their baking recipes as zealously as I and my fellow mushroom foragers guard the locations of our prized chanterelles.

OWEN PRELL
THE ART LAW GROUP
MILL VALLEY, CALIF.

Corby Kummer replies:

Jim Lahey of course never meant to suggest that he receive royalties for his no-knead bread, a method he is the first to

say is ancient. The question posed by the article remains: How can cooks and writers stay active, generous, and solvent?

PERILS OF GASTRONOMY

Is that really Corby Kummer on page 126 of September's *Atlantic*? My husband and I have read and enjoyed every one of his columns. We often wondered just how fat he is. We pictured him waddling from fabulous restaurant to wonderfully managed dairy (huffing and puffing as he climbed a hill, his shiny bald head gleaming cheerfully). Poor Corby flying to Greece, squeezed into the two seats required for a Passenger of Size. Now here he is, a slim, nice-looking man with a full head of hair! How can a person wax euphoric over so many delicious foodstuffs and not be obese? Corby! My hero! Pray, how do you manage to do it?

MEG MELTZ
SANTA FE, N.M.

TERMITE POWER

Although making two liters of hydrogen at atmospheric pressure ("Gut Reactions," September *Atlantic*) is not patently impossible, powering any car for six miles with it is.

STEPHEN BARTOK
RANCHO PALOS VERDES, CALIF.

Lisa Margonelli replies:

I wrote that the two liters of hydrogen produced by termites eating a single sheet of paper were enough to drive a fuel-cell car six miles. Although this appeared to be true on paper, in fact not all liters of hydrogen are equal. As I was recently told by Roy Kim of the California Fuel Cell Partnership, the generic fuel economy of fuel-cell vehicles is 60 miles per 1 kg of gaseous hydrogen at 5,000 psi. However, one cannot easily convert miles per kilogram into miles per liter, as there are different amounts of hydrogen in a liter at any given pressure. So although it may take a stack of magazines, rather than the single page I cited, to power a fuel-cell car, the conversion of cellulosic material into energy is still fairly amazing, and more rewarding than taking out the recycling.

To submit a letter to the editor, please e-mail us at letters@theatlantic.com. Include your full name, city, and state.



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AN AMERICAN REVOLUTION



THE AMERICAN DREAM COULD USE A DOCTOR.

Right now a lot of Americans are struggling. People are worried about the future, not just for themselves, but also for their children and grandchildren. They sense that the American Dream is coming apart at the seams. And for good reason.

Many people are just one illness away from financial ruin, or they are already there. Many don't sign up for their company health care plan, if there is one, because it takes too much out of their paycheck.

And American businesses are struggling to compete because of the high cost of health care that foreign companies don't have to pay. We have outstanding doctors and nurses, the best technology and good medicines, but our system doesn't work for the people who need it most.

Some politicians say the aging of America is the problem, but the experts know better.

The head of Congress's own budget office points out that it's soaring health care costs — not the older population — that's the problem.

We're spending \$2.3 trillion on health care a year, and that number is climbing. There are plenty of sound policy ideas on how to fix this mess: more information technology (every other part of society is ahead of the health care system in this area); more investment in prevention and wellness; better management of chronic illnesses; and providing care that is effective, not wasted (appropriate care is received only a little more than half the time). And while it's true that we need to get everybody covered with health insurance, alone that is not enough.

Today there is new hope and renewed determination. Americans have rallied around this issue and are demanding solutions for accessible, affordable, quality health care.

So why can't we move forward? Because we are caught up in finger pointing, apathy and political paralysis.

We can solve these problems by getting involved and pushing our elected officials toward change. We can hold the candidates accountable for their promises of health care reform and make it a priority in the next administration and the next Congress. Let's be ready.

During the past 50 years, AARP has been at the forefront of advancing the cause of health care in

America, and we're even more committed to solutions for the challenges of the 21st century.

Ultimately, we will help make it possible for all Americans to have access to affordable, quality health care. We are determined to make this part of the American Dream a reality once again.

We're working hard by advocating and laying the groundwork. But we need your help. Get involved and make a difference.

For more ideas on how you can help improve the ailing health care system, go to aarp.org/champion.



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QUICK STUDY

TECHNOLOGY

Innovation Stagnation

In the information age, would-be inventors need to learn a lot more before they can create tomorrow's revolutionizing gizmos. This "burden of knowledge" means that aspiring innovators are going to school longer, specializing more, and relying more heavily on collaboration. Absorbing all the facts at humanity's disposal will require "ever-increasing effort," and the pace of innovation will slow.

—*"The Burden of Knowledge and the 'Death of the Renaissance Man': Is Innovation Getting Harder?,"* Review of Economic Studies

THE ACADEMY

Well-Endowed

Why are Ivy League endowments typically so much larger than those of public universities? Because more-selective private schools—like Harvard, which has built up a \$35 billion behemoth—see far better returns on their endowment investments. Highly competitive schools have skilled administrations, wealthy and connected alumni, and prestigious brand names—all of which can help them draw better asset managers and get better results in the markets.

—*"Secrets of the Academy: The Drivers of University Endowment Success,"* National Bureau of Economic Research

DEFENSE

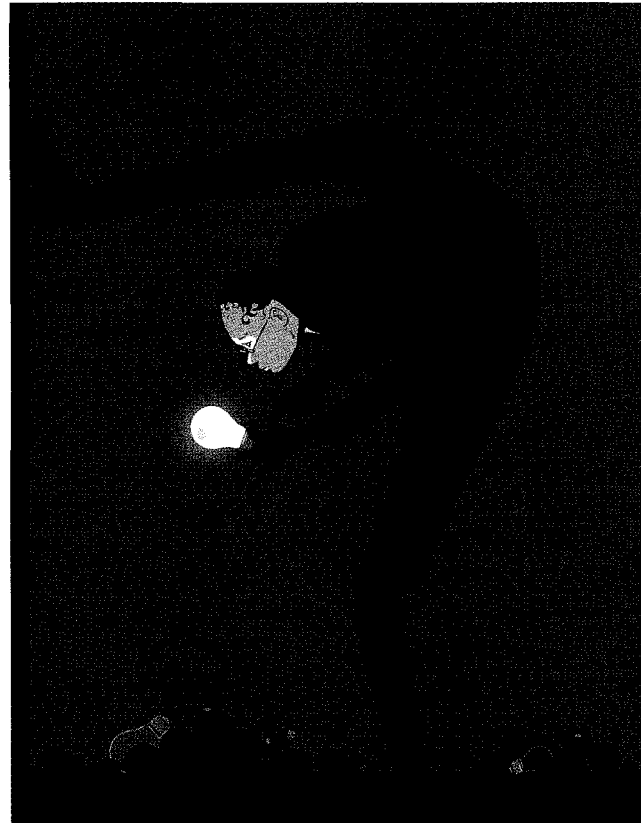
Greener Berets

The Army will need to master a range of green practices—from recycling motor oil to



reducing plastic waste—in order to succeed in the drawn-out stability operations of Iraq and Afghanistan. During long engagements, toxic environments threaten soldiers' health; waste disposal creates logistical and security nightmares; clean water and viable farmland are crucial to winning over the locals; and discarded hazardous materials can blow up unexpectedly or provide targets for terrorists.

—*"Green Warriors: Army Environmental Considerations for Contingency Operations From Planning Through Post-Conflict,"* Rand



researchers subliminally flashed the word *rats* before showing a picture of a political candidate, viewers rated the candidate much more negatively. But when they subliminally flashed a picture of Bill Clinton before showing a photo of a candidate, negative reactions went down among Democrats and up among Republicans. Aspiring Karl Roves, take note: independents were far more easily swayed by unconscious stimuli than were partisans of either party.

—*"RATS, We Should Have Used Clinton: Subliminal Priming in Political Campaigns,"* Political Psychology

TRANSIT

Share the Road

When stuck in traffic, drivers self-interestedly seek shortcuts to avoid the most-congested routes and outsmart their peers. But the cumulative effect of such scheming can make the shortcuts useless—and impede the flow of traffic for everyone else. Motorists attempting shortcuts increase overall driving time by up to 30 percent in Boston, 28 percent in New York, and 24 percent in London. Closing roads, even in high-traffic areas, can actually decrease congestion by limiting drivers' choices and forcing them toward routes that benefit the common good.

—*"The Price of Anarchy in Transportation Networks: Efficiency and Optimality Control,"* Physical Review Letters

ECONOMICS

A Loan in the Dark

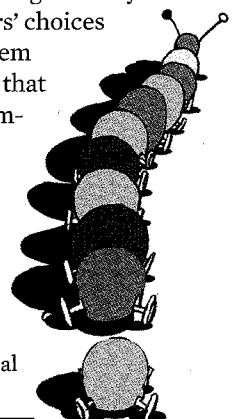
Home buyers: greedy gamblers or unsuspecting gulls? Turns out, a huge number of borrowers didn't know what they were getting into before the mortgage meltdown. Eighteen percent of those who held adjustable-rate mortgages didn't know what the interest rate on their loan was, 41 percent didn't know the maximum rate they could face, and 40 percent believed, wrongly, that rates could rise by only a point or less per year.

—*"Do Borrowers Know Their Mortgage Terms?,"* Journal of Urban Economics

ELECTIONS

The Political Unconscious

Here's a tactic disheartened political strategists might try in 2012. When



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DISPATCHES

ESPIONAGE Joshua Kucera describes what happens when the FBI thinks you're a Russian spy.

MEDICINE Yudhijit Bhattacharjee enters the vicious Indian organ-theft underworld.

CITIES Inara Verzemnieks on the unexpected pitfalls of eco-friendly chicken coops

SPORT Jeffrey Tayler finds an erstwhile NHL superstar prospering in Siberia.

FOOD Corby Kummer divulges the secrets of making good mozzarella.

TRAVEL James Fallows is haunted by Istanbul's whirling dervishes.

TECHNOLOGY Edward Tenner on why the new grand masters of chess are 12 years old



SALLY RYAN/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

Public enemy: even chicken-friendly cities like Portland are confronting the rooster menace, says Inara Verzemnieks.



ESPIONAGE Spooked

THE SPIES WHO LOVED ME
By Joshua Kucera

"WOULD YOU BE interested in writing stories about what we are doing in the Russian government?" Vladimir asked me. We were eating lunch at Cactus Cantina, a sprawling Mexican restaurant near the Russian Embassy; he was having fajitas, I was having enchiladas. His English, by diplomatic standards, wasn't great, so I couldn't tell exactly what he was getting at. Then he added: "We would pay you, of course." Ah. Now it was clear.

I had met Vladimir (not his real name) a week before, at a conference in Washington. He had seen my name on the registration list and sought me out, which was unusual: Russian government officials don't often seek out journalists. The embassy's public-relations officer had never even returned any of

the calls I'd made; Vladimir significantly outranked him.

Vladimir had said he'd been following my stories on eurasianet.org, a news Web site primarily about the former Soviet Union to which I regularly contribute, and wanted to talk to me. So he'd invited me out for lunch, and there we were.

I had no intention of taking his money, but I tried to be noncommittal; I enjoyed his company and the rare chance to talk about Russian-U.S. relations with a high-ranking Russian diplomat. Kosovo had just declared independence—a clear precedent, he argued, taking a sip of his Dos Equis, for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the pro-Russia separatist regions in Georgia, to do the same. I replied that one could make the same case, then, for Chechnya. He looked genuinely puzzled. "But no one in Chechnya wants to be independent," he said.

After Vladimir paid the bill and we left the restaurant, I pointed out a nearby pizza place that was one of my favorites in D.C. and recommended that he

try it some time. So when he next called, about a month later, he proposed that we eat there.

I ordered first, a pizza puttanesca. His eyes brightened. "Ah, Putin! I also will have puttanesca!" he told the waitress.

And he told me more about what he wanted. Giving me the names of two Web sites, russianpeacekeeper.com and inforos.com, he said that I could take any stories on those sites and post them on EurasiaNet. He would pay me "\$300 or \$400," he said, though I was given to believe that that was only his initial offer.

Back at home, I checked out the Web sites. One top story was headlined "Timoshenko Is a Playboy's Star" (referring to Ukraine's prime minister, Yulia Timoshenko, who had said something vaguely positive about the nudie mag in an interview with the Ukrainian edition of *Elle*). Another was "U.S. Navy: Spies, Deserters, Maniacs," which collected various unrelated misdeeds by American sailors. It ended ominously: "One can only guess what the next 'frolic' by U.S. sailors assigned to a cruising nuclear-powered submarine stuffed with ballistic missiles may lead to ..." (Foreboding ellipsis original.)

All of this was fun, and a good story to tell my friends. But apparently some people were taking it more seriously. A few months later, I got a call on my cell phone from a man who identified himself as an FBI agent. "We want to talk to you about someone you've been in contact with," he said. He proposed that we meet at a Starbucks near my home.

On my way to meet him the next morning, I realized that I didn't know what he looked like. Not to worry: I was in Adams Morgan, D.C.'s original hippie/hipster neighborhood, and he and his colleague were FBI agents straight out of central casting, with dark-blue suits and close-cropped hair. They wanted to know everything I knew about Vladimir. I had assumed that he was a spy. But I was pretty confident that there was nothing illegal about our conversations. So I spent about 45 minutes telling them what I could. I learned my experience was not that unusual: Cactus Cantina, the agents told me, was the favorite haunt of Russian spooks (and the cringe-worthy tipping I had observed was standard practice).

R. KIKUO JOHNSON

"Do you have any questions for us?" one of the agents asked at the end of our conversation. Yes: How did you find out about me and get my cell-phone number? "I know you're the FBI," I said, "but—" "Exactly," he said, cutting me off.

He asked me to call him whenever I met again with Vladimir. I balked. I didn't want to be an FBI mole any more than I wanted to be a Russian spy. "Yeah, I know you have your 'journalistic ethics,'" he said, making air quotes around the words.

I left Starbucks with my heart pounding. How did they know I was meeting Vladimir? Did they have their own spy in the Russian Embassy looking at his appointment book? Were they reading his e-mail? Listening to his phone conversations? And were they now reading my e-mail and listening to my phone conversations? And what would happen if I didn't become a mole?

I'll never know. I met with Vladimir a few more times (without telling the FBI). But when I told him I couldn't take his money, he stopped calling. I'm not sure that means, though, that the U.S. government has stopped listening. ■

Joshua Kucera is a writer in Washington, D.C.

MEDICINE

Caveat Donor

A STREET BRAWL IN INDIA BRINGS DOWN A GLOBAL KIDNEY-TRANSPLANT RING.

By Yudhijit Bhattacharjee

IN A COUNTRY where 300 million people live on less than a dollar a day, Amit Kumar—nicknamed "Dr. Horror" by the Indian media after his arrest last winter for heading an illicit global kidney-transplant ring—had little trouble finding homegrown organ donors. One favorite hunting ground was a strip of restaurants, shops, and hovels near an Islamic shrine, or *dargah*, in Mahim, a predominantly Muslim precinct of Mumbai. Devotees of the *dargah*, which attracts people of all faiths, donate money to restaurants to help feed the beggars who cluster there. Last June, walking past one such restaurant whose kitchen extends to the sidewalk, I saw a dozen or so men huddled within scorching distance of giant cauldrons in which meat and potatoes simmered. Expressions glazed and clothing in tatters, the men watched, motionless and

silent, their patience unwavering. I felt as if I were looking at a still photo.

Kumar, who's now on trial, has told officials that he sent his agents to offer such men anywhere from \$500 to \$2,500 for a kidney. Elsewhere, in the fast-growing towns of states like Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, Kumar's ring also went after newly arrived migrant workers seeking jobs.

Most donors were keen to trade their kidneys for cash. Some were professional blood donors, such as Mahesh, who worked at a tea stall near a century-old clock tower with a shattered dial that rises above Meerut, a city in Uttar Pradesh, near Delhi. He, in turn, told me about Shahid, a rickshaw puller who joined Kumar's group after having made a career out of finding men who would sell their blood to nursing homes. Leveraging his knowledge of blood sellers, Shahid became one of Kumar's most successful kidney hunters. Then there was Gyasuddin, a boyish-looking migrant worker with a shock of hair who sold his kidney for \$1,000 and became another node in Kumar's Meerut network.

Wandering through Meerut's narrow streets, amid hundreds of cyclists,



MANAN VATSYAYANA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Two Indian kidney donors recover from their encounter with Dr. Horror's transplant ring.



The panel (from left): David Sandalow, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy; Alexander Karsner, Jonathan Lash

Event:

"Energy Policy for the Next Administration"

Event Panelists: The Honorable Alexander Karsner, *Assistant Secretary, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy*; David Sandalow, *Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution*; Clive Crook, *Chief Washington Commentator, Financial Times & Senior Editor, The Atlantic*; Jonathan Lash, *President, World Resources Institute*

With energy and environmental issues figuring prominently in the upcoming U.S. presidential election, a panel of energy experts issued a united advocacy that the incoming administration ought to pursue a broad range of platforms while fostering private-sector innovation. This insight followed an hour-long panel discussion and Q&A held July 29, 2008, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., convened by the energy company BP.

Before an audience of policy leaders, foundation officials, authors, and academics, the panel members mulled the problems confronting the next presidential administration and stood united in their belief that the nation's best hope for achieving energy independence lay in a diverse portfolio of energy sources.

"We need a comprehensive national energy policy that addresses the challenge of climate change, that drives energy efficiency and encourages increased investment and development of oil, natural gas, solar, wind, bio-fuels, clean coal, and nuclear," Mike Brien, the acting head of BP's Washington office, said in his introductory comments.

In pursuing growth across a variety of renewable sources, the group urged the incoming administration to invest in the innovations of the private sector. "It is the private sector that will deliver the transformation we seek," Karsner said.

In endorsing a wide palette of energy options, Crook similarly advocated further efforts to recover petroleum near U.S. shores when environmental safety concerns can be met. "It's there, and it's valuable, and it goes to waste if you don't recover it," Crook said.

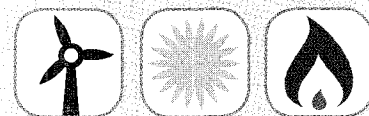
Energy policy makes up a robust portion of the platforms of both candidates, a fact that encouraged the panelists that the time is ripe for substantive change. They cautioned, however, that the complexity of the nation's energy issues would require a long-term commitment rather than a political quick fix.

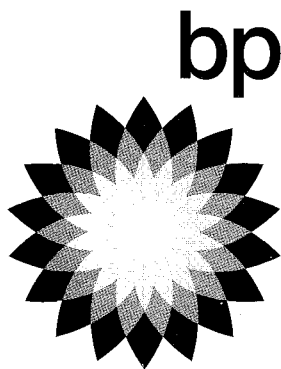
"We can solve these energy problems we're facing, but it's going to take a generation," Sandalow said. "And we don't get anything done in this country without sustained bipartisan cooperation."



Mike Brien, Deputy Chief of Staff, BP America, Inc., introduces the event.

In the weeks leading up to the National Press Club discussion, BP invited readers to pose their own questions to the panelists. Many readers asked which alternative energy source showed the most promise of moving the country's electric grid away from oil in the near term. While the panelists maintained their stance endorsing a diverse energy portfolio, they also cited the recent advances made by wind and solar power.





Energizing the Conversation

Fostering Discussion, Fostering the Future

BP has initiated a groundbreaking program designed to foster meaningful dialogue on the future of energy.

In June, BP launched The Energy Forum Powered by BP, an online hub that engages the general public in meaningful discussion on energy sustainability in the years ahead. In late July, to further the inroads made online, BP convened four energy-focused thought leaders for a live panel discussion on the pressing topic of U.S. energy policy.

This active exchange of ideas among policy makers, academics, and everyday consumers has already unveiled an array of pioneering observations.

"It's astonishing how much of a focus there is in our culture on becoming 'green' and how little the administration has done to face the issue."

–Forum Reader

"I think developing countries ... can learn from the mistakes that countries like the U.S. made decades ago and ... can benefit from the major technological advances that have taken place."

–Forum Reader

Online: The Energy Forum Powered by BP

The Energy Forum Powered by BP invites the public to offer opinions and propose the sort of pioneering ideas that have guided BP to its status as a global energy leader. Since its debut this summer, the forum has played host to a flurry of innovative perspectives on the search for energy solutions.

Energy & Environment

The pursuit of sustainable energy sources resonates with the world's citizens, so much that people are willing to contribute straight from their own pocketbooks.

72%

of those polled would be willing to pay more for energy derived from renewable resources.

54%

of those polled would be willing to pay higher taxes if the money would be used to stimulate sustainable-energy research and development.

Energy & Security

The issue of energy security could have a drastic impact on the upcoming U.S. election, according to poll data.

66%

of respondents rate energy security among the top two or three issues affecting their vote.

Many respondents believe that the key to energy security lies in the use of a variety of energy sources.

"It's like any type of normal investment. The more you diversify ... the better off you will be in the long run."

– Forum Reader

Energy & Growth

Reducing carbon emissions without stunting economic growth requires a delicate balance and has direct environmental implications.

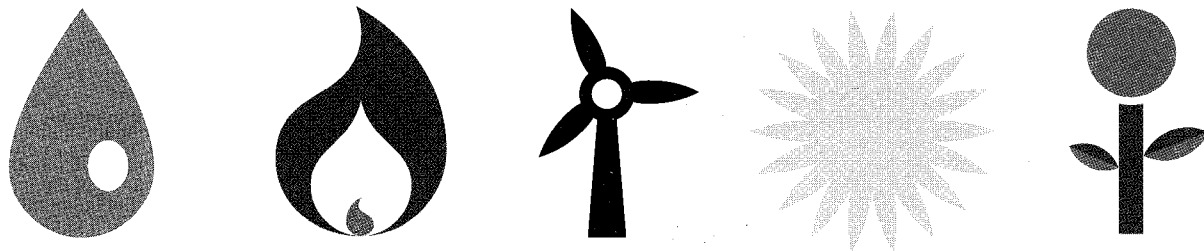
50%

of respondents consider protecting the environment to be the foremost energy-related issue.

54%

believe it is the duty of the United States to promote energy efficiency and clean energy production in developing nations.

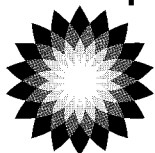
Data based on poll results from June 23 to August 25, 2008



One way out of the energy fix: an energy mix.

It's going to take a menu of hydrocarbons and low carbons to build a more secure and greener sustainable energy future. Over the last five years, BP has invested more than \$30 billion in U.S. energy supplies, which include oil and gas and lower carbon energies like solar and wind. We've also established the Energy Biosciences Institute to search for new breakthroughs that will lead to clean fuel sources for transport. Learn more about America's most diverse energy portfolio at bp.com/us.

bp



beyond petroleum®

a)  oil

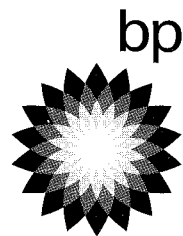
b)  natural gas

c)  wind

d)  solar

e)  biofuels

✓ f) all of the above



beyond petroleum®

rickshaw pullers, three-wheelers, cars, and pedestrians, I asked shop owners and lemonade vendors where I could find other people who had sold their kidneys. They pointed me toward a run-down building across from the tower. Behind a tall iron gate, groups of men were playing cards in the shade of a tree, among them Rakesh, Mahesh, and Om Prakash—all of whom would later raise their shirts to show me long scars above the waist.

Thin as a rail, with some of his front teeth missing and the rest stained brown by tobacco, Prakash paints for a living. “I took the day off today,” he said as we sat down on an empty cart to talk. Nearby, Rakesh toasted a pellet of hash in a matchstick flame.

Sharing a joint, the two men told me that they were paid \$1,000 after their kidneys were taken, in 2006. Prakash said he had been lured by a man posing as a contractor who offered him a month-long painting job for \$4 a day. He was put up in a high-rise apartment in nearby Gurgaon with other workers. The next day, he was taken for an ultrasound and a blood test—and even though he found this puzzling, he went along for fear of losing the job. He was then tempted with more cash in exchange for his kidney. The surgery took place nine days later. With a sheepish grin, Prakash said he had spent all the money on alcohol and prostitutes.

The Indian government’s case against Kumar includes complaints from seven men who allege that they were cheated out of their kidneys. Their stories are similar: Gyasuddin or other agents of Kumar took them to Gurgaon on the pretext of employment as maçons, waiters, or cooks. They were kept at safe houses and medically tested. Some were forced to undergo surgery; others were falsely diagnosed with ailments like gall stones that required surgical treatment.

Dozens of other victims had been willing donors but they weren’t paid what they had been promised. Because Kumar’s agents had to pay for the ultrasound and other tests needed to match each donor to a recipient, they short-changed many donors. The result was a bunch of disgruntled kidney sellers, some of whom complained to police in Jaipur and Mumbai.

On the morning of January 24, a climactic fight broke out between two men near a busy street-crossing in Morādābād, a town in Uttar Pradesh. A crowd gathered, and the already slow traffic of cars, scooters, and cycle-rickshaws came to a halt. One of the men was Gyasuddin, the donor-turned-agent from Meerut. The other was Vidya Prakash, who was accusing Gyasuddin of having stolen his kidney. A constable on street duty found the allegation so odd that instead of letting the men off with a warning, he took them to a nearby police station. And thus did Amit Kumar, India’s self-taught and self-made kidney king, with clients from Europe, Asia, the United States, and the Middle East, and with homes and properties in Mumbai, Toronto, Hong Kong, and Australia, end up in a Haryāna prison. ■

Yudhijit Bhattacharjee is a writer at Science magazine.

CITIES

A Cock Crows in Portland

THE HEARTBREAK OF
URBAN CHICKEN HUSBANDRY

By Inara Verzemnieks

TIME WAS RUNNING out for Fizzle the rooster. Four weeks ago, he had announced his sex to the world, or at least to his Portland, Oregon, neighborhood, crowing so vociferously that there was no denying his masculinity. And that was the problem, because while Portland law allows up to three hens in a resident’s backyard without a permit—making the city a particularly appealing place for those who wish to try their hands at the growing pastime of urban chicken-keeping—roosters are strictly prohibited because of the noise.

This left Fizzle’s owner, Jennifer Scott, in a bind (“Our neighbors love us dearly,” she said, “but not that much”). It also placed Fizzle firmly in an emerging urban underclass: the homeless rooster.

Questions of sustainability and food provenance and, to a lesser extent, fears about economic instability have motivated folks in more and more cities—places like Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Fort Collins, Colorado—to install chicken

coops in their backyards, in the hope of reaping fresh eggs, free fertilizer, and organic pest control. Of course, introducing all these chickens into cities has had unanticipated consequences, flashes of red tooth and claw that interrupt bucolic fantasy: family pets gobbling up chickens; chickens gobbling up lead-based paint chips. But all this is nothing compared to the mysteries of chicken sexing.

Simply put, it’s not easy to size up a chicken’s true leanings, at least not right away. That’s a lesson many urban chicken owners learn the hard way, because no matter how attached they become to this creature they’re raising from an egg, even chicken-friendly cities such as Portland (where a tour highlighting the best in backyard avian architecture—think coops with eco-roofs and heated floors—attracted more than 600 people last year) draw a firm line at roosters. So the question becomes: How to get rid of them?

Turning them into dinner does not seem to be popular, sustainability benefits aside. Instead, other, more decidedly urban solutions have emerged. New postings pop up almost daily on Craigslist featuring roosters that need to leave Portland, pronto: “cute rooster who crows too loud for the neighbor, very sad to let him go, but we must until the city changes its mind.” Like personal ads for humans, many include descriptions of the ideal match, mentions of farm fantasies, and attempts to warn away the wrong partner: “Too small for a chicken dinner.”

There is another option for Portland’s roosters on the run: about 40 minutes from downtown, just off the Mount Hood Highway in the town of Boring, sits Geren’s Farm Supply. The feed store has long operated a small, low-ceilinged shed called the Critter Korner, where farmers bring unwanted livestock. Geren’s then sells the animals. In recent years, however, city people have turned Geren’s into a kind of relocation center for banished roosters, according to Roz Rushing, the daughter of Geren’s owners. “I’ve had grown men in tears because they raised them as babies and they live in the city and can’t have a rooster,” Rushing says from behind the feed-store counter, where a dry-erase board keeps a running tally

of Critter Korner's population, and an orange cat named Mr. Dunn naps amid the day's paperwork. "Then there's some people, they've been spurred by their roosters, and they can't wait to get rid of 'em. They say, 'Take it away now. I never want to see it again.'"

Fizzle's owner decided against making the trek to Boring. Although Geren's sells the animals only for farm use, it obviously can't guarantee that they don't become someone's dinner. Not willing to take this chance, Scott posted and reposted Fizzle's details on the Internet, praying for a response—and the continued patience of her neighbors.

Finally, one day, Fizzle received an offer from a compatible suitor: he would be leaving Portland, his birthplace, for a rural community about 20 miles south. Perhaps best of all, from Fizzle's perspective, anyway, he would become a breeding rooster. Life in the country, it seems, has its upside. **A**

Inara Verzemnieks is a writer in Portland.

SPORT

Exile

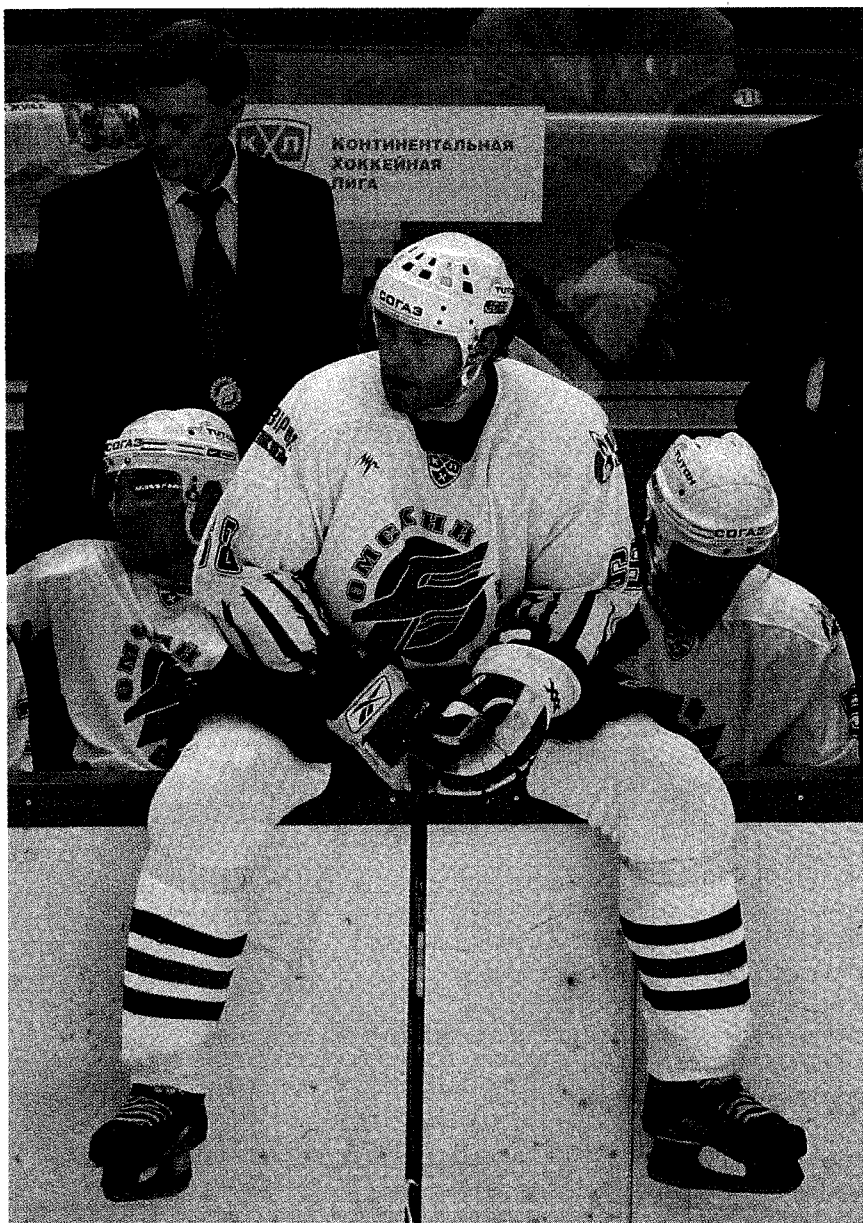
AFTER 17 YEARS IN THE NHL, CZECH HOCKEY STAR JAROMIR JAGR HITS THE ICE—AND THE JACKPOT—IN SIBERIA.

By Jeffrey Tayler

THE STOMP-STOMP-CLAP of Queen's "We Will Rock You" thundered as Jaromir Jagr's image on the video screen above the rink flicked off and the player himself left the bench. Hunched menacingly and clutching his stick, he skated onto the ice with his teammates through a glowing red-white-and-black mock-up of a hawk's open beak, occasioning the first of many stadium-wide chants—"JAGR! JAGR! JAGR!"

Held in a new, 10,000-seat arena, the sold-out game, which was to be nationally televised, bore all the trappings (and then some) of an NHL contest, including a squad of solarium-bronzed cheerleaders and a pulley-operated hawk that swooped from its perch above center ice, claws splayed, to overfly the rink.

The national anthem that roused the crowd to its feet, however, began with



Jagr, wearing number 68 to commemorate the Prague Spring, waits to play in Omsk.

Rossiya—svyashchennaya nasha derzhava ("Russia—our holy country"); and, save for a few Toyota and Nikon logos, all the names limned onto the ice belonged to Russian companies: Gazprom, Sogaz, Mostovik, Yasnaya Polyana. The Czech-born Jagr, 36, a right wing who has topped rosters for the Pittsburgh Penguins, the Washington Capitals, and the New York Rangers since 1990, is now playing for Avangard Omsk, of the new Continental Hockey League, in Omsk, Siberia. This was his team's first home game of the 2008–2009 season, against Metallurg, from the Ural Mountain town of Magnitogorsk.

Omsk, a Siberian regional capital of 1.1 million in bear-prowled taiga 1,600 miles east of Moscow, is probably the last place American hockey fans would expect to find Jagr, who remains close to the top of his game, despite his age. Until recently, Russians, who know the city as a czarist-era prison outpost and a center for heavy industry, would probably have found it odd as well, since for almost two decades they had watched their best hockey players flee to the NHL. But nowadays, Russians see nothing unusual in Jagr's presence. Given their booming energy economy, they can afford such talent: on Avangard

Omsk's roster, Jagr is joined by two other Czechs and the journeyman American goalie John Grahame.

Russia is in a nationalistic mood these days, but hiring foreign players accords with the Zeitgeist. Before the game, sitting in the stands as the team warmed up, I talked with Konstantin Potapov, Avangard Omsk's president.

"We created the Continental Hockey League to rival the NHL," he said. "Why should the best Russians have to go to the NHL? We're actively recruiting foreign players, the best of them." This being Russia, even big sporting endeavors usually need the blessing of the authorities. No exception here: the Omsk municipal administration is a prominent sponsor of the team, and Potapov confirmed the pivotal role of the Omsk Oblast governor in bringing Jagr on board. The oligarch Roman Abramovich may have quietly helped finance the new stadium, Omsk Arena. All this bespeaks a patriotism that was often lacking in the 1990s, when big money fled Russia and the government seemed paralyzed.

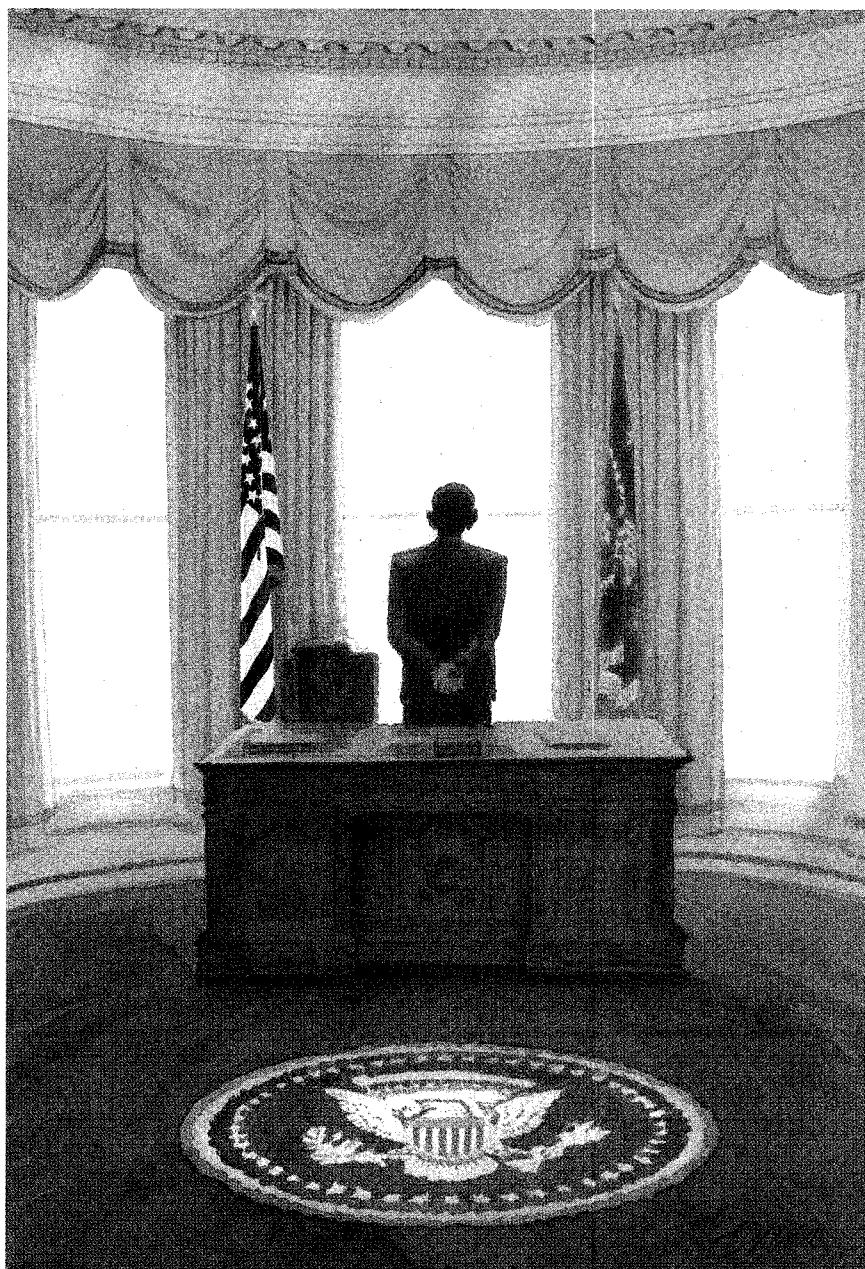
Still, Jagr's presence in former gulag country seems a bit surreal. He is, after all, a committed anticommunist who wears the number 68 in memory of the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring, in 1968, the same year his grandfather, who had been dispossessed and imprisoned by the Communists, died. This past summer, when the New York Rangers declined to renew his contract, Jagr could have found another NHL team—though perhaps not one willing to pay him \$11 million, roughly his first-year salary with Omsk.

After the game (which Avangard Omsk won 6–0, with Jagr scoring one goal), I asked him about his decision over a dinner of steak and potatoes in the players' dining room. He exuded a warm, boyish shyness, despite his fame, but he spoke without mincing words.

"I had hoped to sign with New York, and that didn't happen. But I came to Omsk because I wanted to. Here in Russia, you have the real freedom, which is not like U.S. freedom. Back there you have so many rules." He smiled.

"If the police stop you [in the U.S.] because you're going too fast, they can put you in jail. But sometimes you just need to go fast. Here, you always have

GALLERY DREAM by Harry Bliss



choices"—including, he seemed to imply, bribing one's way out of trouble.

"Is that the only reason you came to Omsk?" I asked.

"No. This is Europe, and it's closer to my culture than America." His conversion to Russian Orthodoxy eight years ago factored into his decision, he told me, as did his stint playing with Avangard Omsk during the NHL lockout over salaries during the 2004–2005 season. "You know, as a kid I wanted to play for the NHL, and I never thought

about Omsk. But life is crazy. The world just moves so quickly."

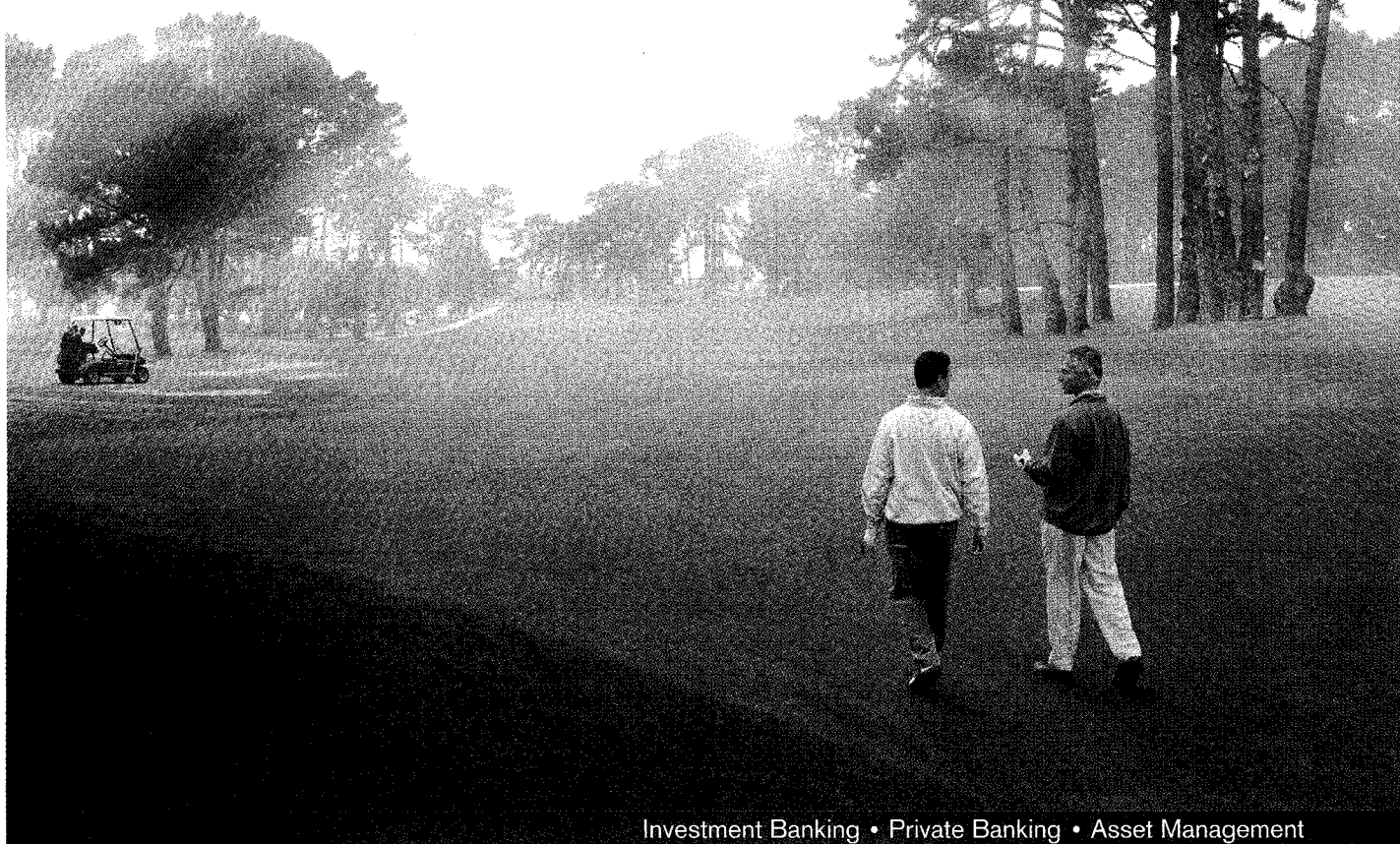
"But your jersey number is 68. Didn't you have any compunctions about signing on with the Russians?"

"Czech Communists, not Soviets, imprisoned [my grandfather]. And to say I won't come to Russia would be like saying I wouldn't go to Germany because they started World War II. You have to let it go." ■

Jeffrey Tayler is an Atlantic correspondent.

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An Italian gift: burrata, mozzarella stuffed with cream-soaked mozzarella

FOOD

Cheese Balls

MOZZARELLA'S AMERICAN RENAISSANCE

By Corby Kummer

FOUR YEARS AGO, Romans began flocking to a bar called Òbikà to order mozzarella—served in little bowls, accompanied by artisan products like prosciutto and carpaccio—as if they had never tasted it before. Despite the Japanese-sounding name and the sushi-bar look and logo, everything at Òbikà is Italian, and the cheese is trucked from the mozzarella homeland, south of Rome. This fall, the first American outpost opened in the lobby of the IBM Building in Manhattan. It's modest, if sleek, and geared for lunch.

And it's late. Last year, the most talked-about restaurant opening was Mozza, in Los Angeles. The chef and co-owner, Nancy Silverton, was looking for inspiration after leaving Campanile Restaurant, and found it when she stepped into Òbikà. "It's the perfect canvas," she told me of her mozzarella moment. "It's so mild. You couldn't open a Gorgonzola bar."

Silverton and her partners, Mario Batali and Joseph Bastianich, took a broader—and better—approach than Òbikà, starting with their decision to offer a wide range of dishes, with and without cheese, and a choice of

domestic and imported mozzarella, both cow's-milk and the buffalo Òbikà specializes in. (Buffalo milk connotes luxury, but aside from its much higher butterfat content, it doesn't necessarily taste better.) Mozza and its adjoining pizzeria caught on so fast because of the owners' celebrity—and because they had a secret weapon.

Many American trend-following chefs boast of their house-made mozzarella. They have little to boast about. Silverton quickly saw why Batali had advised her against making her own after a brief apprenticeship to a Bronx master. "It was very bland," she said of the mozzarella she made, "no matter what I did."

I tried my own hand at paddling a rubbery mass of cheese curd in hot water and tearing off balls of mozzarella—*mozzare* means "to break"—at Fiore di Nonno, near Boston. Lourdes Fiore Smith, the owner, is the granddaughter of a mozzarella maker who supplied Frank Sinatra and his mother, Dolly; his shop, Fiore's Deli, still makes mozzarella in Hoboken. As with piecrust and meat loaf, the goal is to manhandle the "dough" as little as possible, to avoid toughening the texture and losing too

much butterfat to the water. It was fun but tricky, and I saw why restaurants should leave it to the pros.

I also realized why Italian mozzarella usually tastes so much better: the water. The difference between mozzarella and cheese curds, which taste like hard, crumbly cottage cheese, is only air, for a spongy, chewy texture, and water. And water, paradoxically, potentiates mozzarella's supreme milkiness. My favorite bottled water is from the volcanic region south of Rome; it's the water, many think, that made Neapolitan pizza and pasta famous. Why shouldn't water make Italian mozzarella so good?

Cream can help too. The secret Mozza weapon is burrata, mozzarella filled with shreds of mozzarella soaked in cream. The first bite of burrata, with its unexpected, slow, viscous, creamy goosh, produces fugue-like states. I recently watched a friend take one bite of a softball-size burrata and look up a short time later, unaware he had finished the whole thing. I had seen it before. I had done it before.

The burrata was made in South El Monte, an industrial region east of Los Angeles, by Vito Girardi, the owner of Gioia Cheese. No one in this country makes burrata as good. Few even try.

Girardi himself is surprised by his cheese's success. His family sold little of it in Italy—just 20 pounds a week, he told me—though they made burrata near its birthplace, southeast of buffalo territory, in Puglia (it is mostly a post-war phenomenon, and made with cow's milk). Now he sells 2,000 pounds a day.

Gioia Cheese is like any small family-run business in Italy: Girardi, a hard-working, naturally elegant Italian, works in the office next door to his wife, Monica, and they talk across the wall in Italian; their 22-year-old son, Frank, decided to forgo college and go right into the family business. Most of their sales are local.

And there's a new mozzarella frontier, one undreamed of in Òbikà's franchising plans: "burricotti," the couple's inspiration—mozzarella filled with homemade ricotta. I'd never heard of it before Silverton handed me a very large portion. The whole thing was gone before I looked up. ■

Corby Kummer is an Atlantic senior editor.

STEFANO SCATA/GRAND TOUR/CORBIS

GUIDE THROUGH HEATHROW TERMINAL 5

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The common name, whirling dervishes, sounds silly; the dance is anything but.

TRAVEL

The Ottoman Mystique

IN TURKEY, THERE ARE DANCERS, AND THERE ARE DANCERS.

By James Fallows

BEFORE GOING TO Istanbul, I barely thought about the place. Now, a year later, it is often on my mind. That is mainly because it provides what is rarest in travel: an aesthetic and even sensual surprise.

You learn something from every place you visit, even when what you learn is that you should not have come. (Ever been to Lagos?) But so familiar does our world seem from movies, pictures, TV, blogs that often the effect of travel is to leave you thinking: *I knew that already. Yes, that's the Alamo, but it's so much smaller in real life!*

Therefore parts of my brain are permanently marked by encounters with places that really are different from what

I had envisioned. The sound and smell of Indonesia: seconds after the airplane door opened on our first arrival in Jakarta, my wife and I were swimming in hot, wet Javanese air that carried the sweet smoke of clove-flavored *krettek* cigarettes and the tones of brass gamelan gongs. The look of the temple field at Pagan, in central Burma, as we walked over a rise and all at once saw the broad plain filled with countless hundreds of ancient, bell-shaped brick stupas.

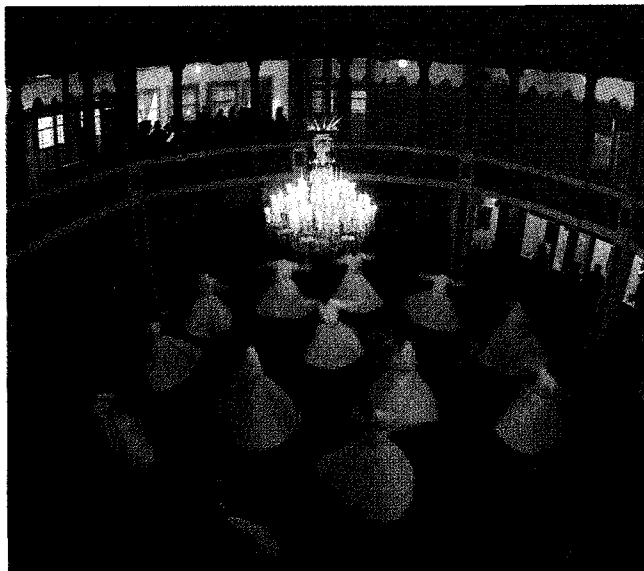
I have more items on this list, though there can never be enough. One of the most vivid is the Ottoman motif of Istanbul, especially as expressed by its dancers.

Now, there are dancers, and there are dancers, in Turkey. As one whose night-

mares involve being forced to sing or gyrate in front of a crowd, and who crosses to the other side of the street, just to be safe, whenever passing a karaoke bar, I was horrified early in my visit to Turkey to wind up as an involuntary participant in a belly-dancing show where I had been taken by "friends." The belly dancers we saw—twirling sabers, holding and beating drums, their faces covered with sequined masks but with acres of torso exposed—came not from Turkey but from Georgia and former Soviet Stans. Still, they exactly matched one travel guide's description of Turkish dancers as having "exceedingly well trained abdominal muscles," which was one of several ways to distinguish them from the male victims pulled from the crowd to dance alongside them, shirts tugged off and red fezzes planted on their heads.

I have suppressed the rest of this memory—and replaced it with memories of the sublime: watching the Sufi

SEDAT SUNA/NARPHOTOS/REDUX



Everything about Istanbul, from its performers to its architecture, expresses the Ottoman motif.

dancers known as *Mevlevi*, or whirling dervishes. In English, the name sounds silly. In truth, this was about the least silly and most gripping religious performance I have ever seen.

My wife and I caught our first glance in the most touristy of places. We had spent the day at the Topkapı Palace, whose spectacular setting on a bluff overlooking the Bosphorus and Golden Horn rivals in majesty anything implied by Versailles or the Forbidden City, and whose decorative touches, angles, and proportions are just different enough from Western European standards to make me think of movie sets by Tim Burton. We were walking down toward the adjoining grand structures of the city's monumental heart: the Hagia Sophia—for a thousand years a cathedral, for 500 years a mosque, in modern times a museum—and the Sultan Ahmet, or “Blue,” Mosque. Around

us were festive family groups, accompanying preteen boys in shiny satin, sultan-style outfits, with capes, turbans, and scepters, indicating that this was their circumcision day—a rite generally performed long past infancy in Turkey.

Across the square we glimpsed a tall, lean, broad-shouldered man standing motionless on an open-air stage. At tables around him people ate and drank, oblivious. The man wore a pure white jacket and skirt over white trousers, and a very tall dun-colored cylindrical hat. He looked straight ahead—and then, as music rose from the reed-flute player and the drummer seated next to him, he began to rotate exactly in place, faster and faster.

His white skirt stood out full around him; he extended his arms, airplane style, one pointed toward heaven and one toward Earth. He cocked his head so the long hat was parallel with his

outstretched arms. And for improbable minutes and minutes, he turned.

During those minutes, we did not move, nor did our eyes ever leave him. He had put himself into a trance, and had done something similar to many of the onlookers, who one by one stopped whatever else they were doing to simply gaze.

Eventually the dancer slowed, then left the stage, with no acknowledgment of any sort to the crowd. He sat by himself at a table to recover, drinking water. During the rest of our time in the city we learned more about the symbols expressed in this dance—the eerie hat evoking the tombstone that awaits us all—and sought out other *Mevlevi*, in less obvious settings. And now, when I think of that dancer, I still hear the first notes from the reed flute, and see the look, into nothing, in his eyes. ■

James Fallows is an Atlantic national correspondent.

MORE ONLINE

For a slideshow of Istanbul and its whirling dervishes, narrated by James Fallows, visit www.theatlantic.com/istanbul.

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TECHNOLOGY

Rook Dreams

NEW CHESS SOFTWARE MAKES IT EASIER FOR YOUNGER PLAYERS TO REACH THE TOP OF THE GAME—AND HARDER TO STAY THERE.

By Edward Tenner

THIS PAST FALL, the world championship match in Bonn, Germany, wasn't the only thing stirring up chess enthusiasts. ChessBase 10, a beefier new version of the massive database program that is the tournament player's gold standard, had arrived.

In 1997, when IBM's Deep Blue multi-processor computer defeated the world champion, Garry Kasparov, rapid gains in electronic chess seemed likely to diminish the game's challenge and glamour. Instead, the Web has built participation at the base and refined concepts at the summit. A new cohort of competitors is playing stronger chess than ever—but its emergence is changing the game in unexpected ways.

ChessBase, introduced for Atari in 1987, is now a compendium of 3.75 million games reaching back more than five centuries. Compiling statistics, including the results from games just downloaded from the Web, it also shows percentages of games won after various alternative moves. The heritage of chess thus becomes a vast, branching cave to be explored game by game.

Jon Edwards, a chess teacher and the 1997 U.S. correspondence champion,

says that players still grow through hours of replaying great games; ChessBase just makes that process more efficient. Young Bobby Fischer huddled in the New York Public Library stacks with Russian magazines, constantly resetting pieces. Today's contenders can play through new games online and on-screen, adding their own games to the ChessBase record and learning more rapidly from their mistakes.

Knowing thine adversary has never been easier. Even the victorious defending champion Viswanathan Anand has said he can't afford to have a favorite opening. Under pressure because of efficient scrutiny through databases and analysis engines like Fritz (another popular high-level software program that works out new moves), top players must prepare more variations than ever.

Meanwhile, aspirants have overcome distance. Michael V. Cossette, a chemical-process engineer who became a state junior champion in high school, in 1973, recalls that the chess club nearest to his home was a full hour away. In 2008, free chess sites offer databases, online play, and tutorials worldwide.

Today's initiates constitute the latest of three great recruitment waves. The

first, in the 1930s, was prompted by the Soviet drive for prestige through chess victories. The second was inspired by Bobby Fischer's televised defeat, in 1972, of the Russian superstar Boris Spassky. The third began in the early 1990s, with the rise of the Internet and the emergence of an underemployed intelligentsia in the former Soviet empire that found even modest tournament prizes in hard currency preferable to poverty.

This wave has generated more grand masters than ever, and they are getting stronger younger. Spassky had become one at a record 18, Fischer at 15; in 2002, the Ukrainian Sergei Karjakin was only 12. The Norwegian Magnus Carlsen, a grand master at 13, in 2004, is ranked fourth in the world.

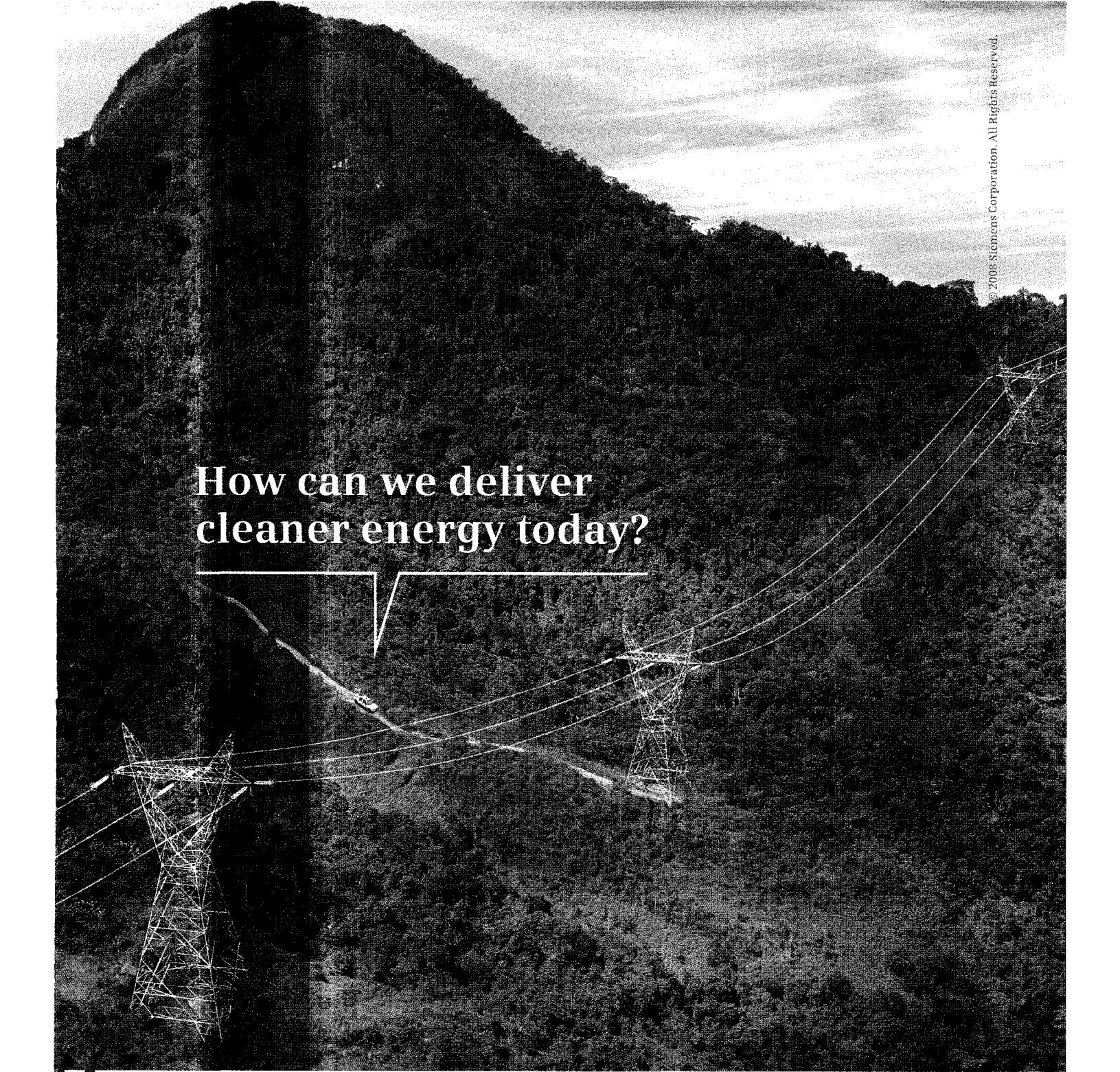
The intelligence researchers William Dickens and James Flynn have suggested that when a generation of young people becomes serious about an activity—as black high-school students turned to basketball in the 1950s—a self-reinforcing “social multiplier” of institutions that recognize and develop talent emerges, raising performance. ChessBase and other analysis programs, and the virtual communities that have sprung up around them, have had a similar effect, according to Edwards and other masters.

But there is a catch. As computers have hooked more contenders and augmented their skills, preparation time has increased. There's never been much money in full-time chess playing, and now the commitment needed to keep up with the game makes it harder to moonlight in a different profession. One of Edwards's star students reluctantly gave up his promising pro career to attend law school. And some highly rated amateurs quit, too, as Cossette did in 2001. “It isn't a sport anymore,” he observes. “It isn't a game. It's a research project.” For him and many other professionals, it's too much like work.

Not all top recreational players agree. Many love computer-assisted analysis and exploration. As a teacher, Edwards believes youth chess is great preparation for college and life. But in chess as in life, technological edges can cut both ways. **A**

Edward Tenner is the author of *Why Things Bite Back* and *Our Own Devices*.

JASON SCHNEIDER



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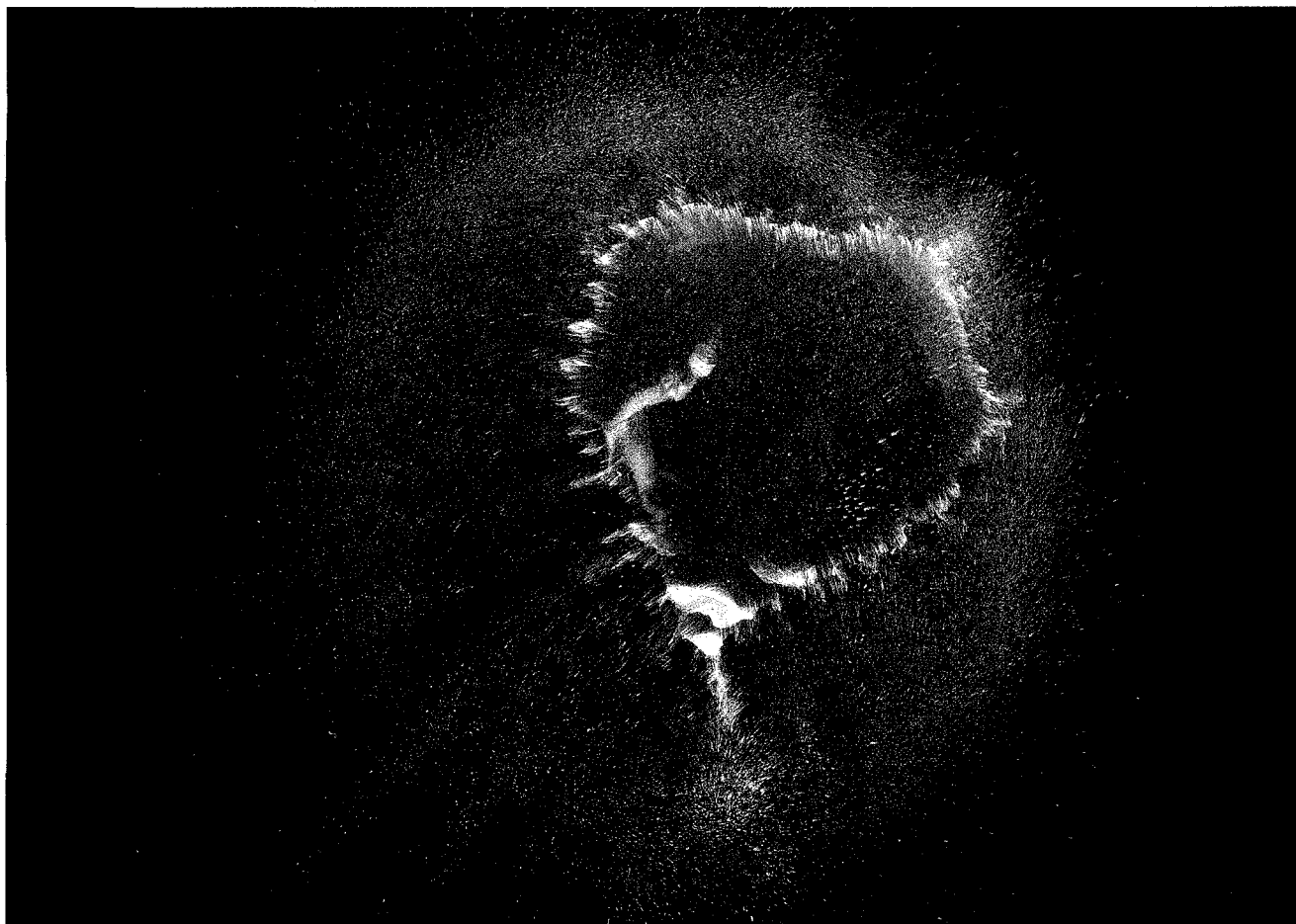
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Pop Psychology

Why asset bubbles are a part of the human condition that regulation can't cure
By Virginia Postrel

IN THESE UNCERTAIN economic times, we'd all like a guaranteed investment. Here's one: it pays a 24-cent dividend every four weeks for 60 weeks, 15 dividends in all. Then it disappears. Unlike a bond, this security has no redemption value. It simply provides guaranteed dividends. It involves no tricky derivatives or unknown risks. And it carries absolutely no danger of default. What would you pay for it?

Before financially sophisticated readers drag out their calculators, look

up interest rates, and compute the present value of those future payments, I have a confession to make. You can't buy this security, and it doesn't really pay dividends every four weeks. It pays every four *minutes*, in a computer lab, to volunteers in economic experiments.

For more than two decades, economists have been running versions of the same experiment. They take a bunch of volunteers, usually undergraduates but sometimes businesspeople or graduate students; divide them into experimental groups of roughly a dozen; give each person money and shares to trade with;

and pay dividends of 24 cents at the end of each of 15 rounds, each lasting a few minutes. (Sometimes the 24 cents is a flat amount; more often there's an equal chance of getting 0, 8, 28, or 60 cents, which averages out to 24 cents.) All participants are given the same information, but they can't talk to one another and they interact only through their trading screens. Then the researchers watch what happens, repeating the same experiment with different small groups to get a larger picture.

The great thing about a laboratory experiment is that you can control the

CHRISTOPHER STEVENSON/GETTY IMAGES



Breakthrough Leads to Windows That Produce Energy

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — University scientists have developed windows that collect solar energy. A major advancement, the windows use a special coating to absorb sunlight and then re-emit the energy into the glass, which conducts it to solar cells.

'Guerilla Gardeners' Take Initiative to Beautify Urban Areas

LOS ANGELES — People all over the world are reaching for rakes and shovels in an effort to transform neglected public spaces. And they're not waiting for permission from city officials. It's a grassroots movement that's growing. Literally. On any given

Saturday night in cities from L.A. to London, you can find ordinary citizens pulling weeds alongside freeway off-ramps. Or planting flowers in vacant lots. And it's almost always done anonymously. In most cities, getting approval to beautify public property

is nearly impossible. Not because anyone objects to the idea, but because bureaucracy often gets in the way. As a result, "guerilla gardeners" are quietly taking it upon themselves, donating time and resources to help change the face of their neighborhoods.

New Plastics Biodegrade in Just Four Months

ROLLA, Mo. — A team of researchers is creating new types of biodegradable plastic that will help reduce the amount of landfill-clogging waste Americans produce each year. The material, which modifies several bio-based, oil-based and natural polymers, could go a long way toward minimizing the size of landfills. Ultimately, the team hopes to develop a variety of applications for the plastic, including bags, bottles and product packaging.

Pact Protects 2,400 Square Miles of Amazon

GEORGETOWN, Guyana — With the support of a U.S.-based conservation organization, leaders from Guyana's Wai Wai tribe are working to protect their section of the rainforest from commercial loggers. The 2,400-square-mile Wai Wai-controlled section helps make up a vital area called the Guyana Shield, which includes approximately 25 percent of the tropical rainforests left in the world. It's also home to several rare animals, including the jaguar.

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environment. Wall Street securities carry uncertainties—more, lately, than many people expected—but this experimental security is a sure thing. “The fundamental value is unambiguously defined,” says the economist Charles Noussair, a professor at Tilburg University, in the Netherlands, who has run many of these experiments. “It’s the expected value of the future dividend stream at any given time”: 15 times 24 cents, or \$3.60 at the end of the first round; 14 times 24 cents, or \$3.36 at the end of the second; \$3.12 at the end of the third; and so on down to zero. Participants don’t even have to do the math. They can see the total expected dividends on their computer screens.

Here, finally, is a security with security—no doubt about its true value, no hidden risks, no crazy ups and downs, no bubbles and panics. The trading price should stick close to the expected value.

At least that’s what economists would have thought before Vernon Smith, who won a 2002 Nobel Prize for developing experimental economics, first ran the test in the mid-1980s. But that’s not what happens. Again and again, in experiment after experiment, the trading price runs up way above fundamental value. Then, as the 15th round nears, it crashes. The problem doesn’t seem to be that participants are bored and fooling around. The difference between a good trading performance and a bad one is about \$80 for a three-hour session, enough to motivate cash-strapped students to do their best. Besides, Noussair emphasizes, “you don’t just get random noise. You get bubbles and crashes.” Ninety percent of the time.

So much for security.

These lab results should give pause not only to people who believe in efficient markets, but also to those who think we can banish bubbles simply by curbing corruption and imposing more regulation. Asset markets, it seems, suffer from irrepressible effervescence. Bubbles happen, even in the most controlled conditions.

Experimental bubbles are particularly surprising because in laboratory markets that mimic the production of goods and services, prices rise and fall as economic theory predicts, reaching a neat equilibrium where supply meets

demand. But like real-world purchasers of haircuts or refrigerators, buyers in those markets need to know only how much they themselves value the good. If the price is less than the value to you, you buy. If not, you don’t, and vice versa for sellers.

Financial assets, whether in the lab or the real world, are trickier to judge: Can I flip this security to a buyer who will pay more than I think it’s worth? In an experimental market, where the value of the security is clearly specified, “worth” shouldn’t vary with taste, cash needs, or risk calculations. Based on future dividends, you know for sure that the security’s current value is, say, \$3.12. But—here’s the wrinkle—you don’t know that I’m as savvy as you are. Maybe I’m confused. Even if I’m not, you don’t know whether I know that you know it’s worth \$3.12. Besides, as long as a clueless greater fool who might pay \$3.50 is out there, we smart people may decide to pay \$3.25 in the hope of making a profit. It doesn’t matter that we know the security is worth \$3.12. For the price to track the fundamental value, says Noussair, “everybody has to know that everybody knows that everybody is rational.” That’s rarely the case. Rather, “if you put people in asset markets, the first thing they do is not try to figure out the fundamental value. They try to buy low and sell high.” That speculation creates a bubble.

In fact, the people who make the most money in these experiments aren’t the ones who stick to fundamentals. They’re the speculators who buy a lot at the beginning and sell midway through, taking advantage of “momentum traders” who jump in when the market is going up, don’t sell until it’s going down, and wind up with the least money at the end. (“I have a lot of relatives and friends who are momentum traders,” comments Noussair.) Bubbles start to pop when the momentum traders run out of money and can no longer push prices up.

But people do learn. By the third time the same group goes through a 15-round market, the bubble usually disappears. Everybody knows what the security is worth and realizes that everybody else knows the same thing. Or at least that’s what economists assumed was happening. But work that

Noussair and his co-authors published in the December 2007 *American Economic Review* suggests that traders don't reason that way.

In this version of the experiment, participants took part in the 15-round market four times in a row. Before each session, the researchers asked the traders what they thought would happen to prices. The first time, participants didn't expect a bubble, but in later markets they did. With each successive session, however, they predicted that the bubble would peak later and reach a higher price than it actually did. Expecting the future to look like the past, they traded accordingly, selling earlier and at lower prices than in the previous session, hoping to realize a profit before the bubble burst. Those trades, of course, changed the market pattern. Prices were lower, and they peaked closer to the beginning of the session. By the fourth round, the price stuck close to the security's fundamental value—not because traders were going for the rational price but because they were trying to avoid getting caught in a bubble.

"Prices converge toward fundamentals ahead of beliefs," the economists conclude. Traders literally learn from experience, basing their expectations and behavior not on logical inference but on what has happened in the past. After enough rounds, markets work their way toward a stable price.

If experience eliminates bubbles in the lab, you might expect that more-experienced traders in the real world (or what experimental economists prefer to call "field markets") would produce fewer financial crises. When asset markets run into trouble, maybe it's because there are too many newbies: all those dot-com day traders, 20-something house flippers, and newly minted M.B.A.s. As Alan Greenspan told Congress in October, "It was the failure to

properly price such risky assets that precipitated the crisis." People didn't know what they were doing. What markets need are more old hands.

Alas, once again the situation is not so simple. Even experienced traders can make big mistakes when conditions change. In research published in the June 2008 *American Economic Review*,

Vernon Smith and his collaborators first ran the standard experiment, putting groups through the 15-round market twice. Then the researchers changed three conditions: they mixed up the groups, so participants weren't trading with familiar faces; they increased the range of possible dividends, replacing four possible outcomes (0, 8, 28, or 60) averaging 24, with five (0, 1, 8, 28, 98) averaging 27; finally, they doubled the amount of cash and halved the number of shares in the market. The participants then completed a third round. These changes

were based on previous research showing that more cash and bigger dividend spreads exacerbate bubbles.

Sure enough, under the new conditions, the experienced traders generated a bubble just as big as if they'd never been in the lab. It didn't last quite as long, however, or involve as much volume. "Participants seem to be tacitly aware that there will be a crash," the economists write, "and consequently exit from the market (sell) earlier, causing the crash to start earlier." Even so, the price peaks far above the fundamental value. "Bubbles," the economists conclude, "are the funny and unpredictable phenomena that happen on the way to the 'rational' predicted equilibrium if the environment is held constant long enough."

For those of us who invest our money outside the lab, this research carries two implications.

First, beware of markets with too much cash chasing too few good deals.

When the Federal Reserve cuts interest rates, it effectively frees up more cash to buy financial instruments. When lenders lower down-payment requirements, they do the same for the housing market. All that cash encourages investment mistakes.

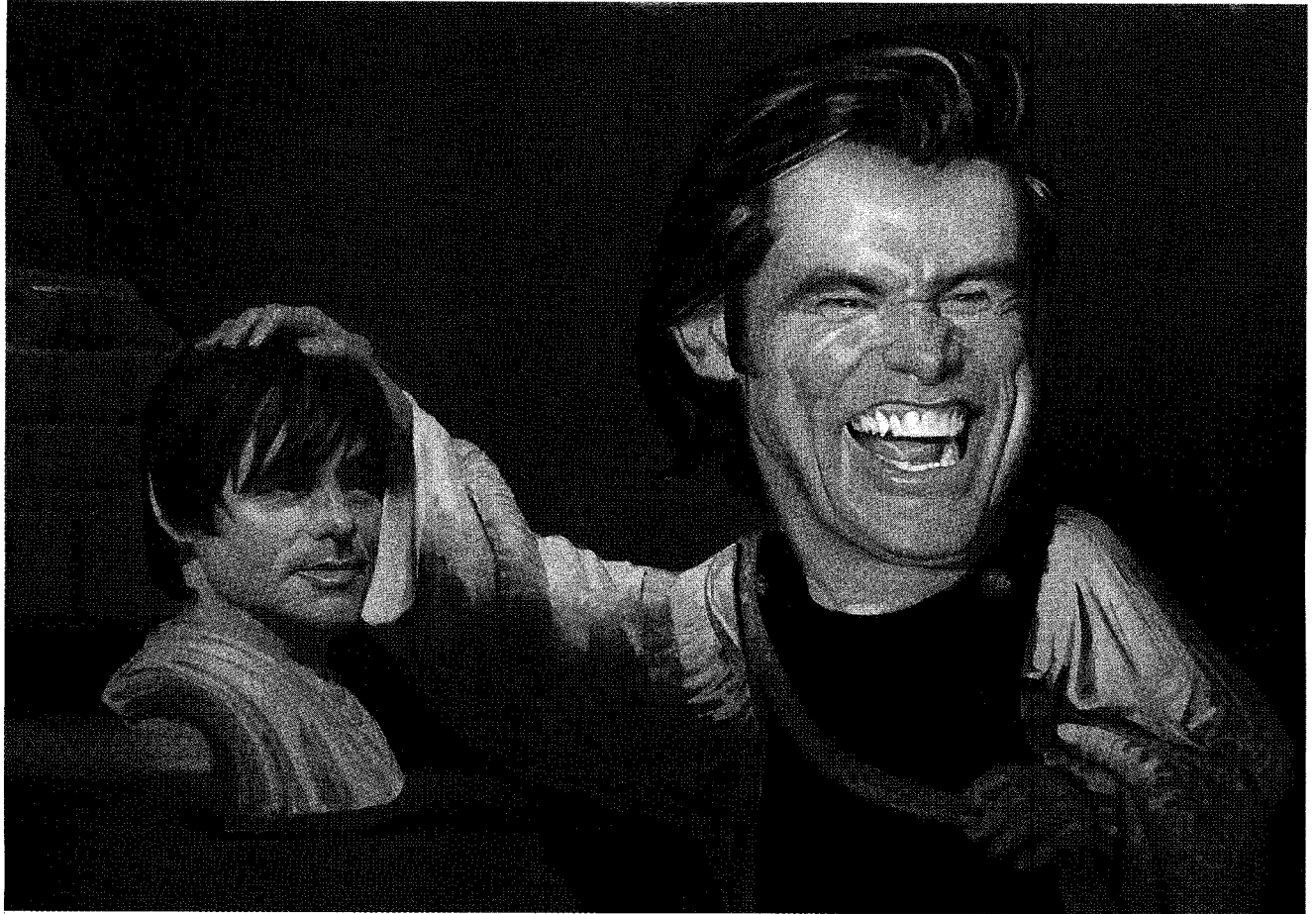
Second, big changes can turn even experienced traders into ignorant novices. Those changes could be the rise of new industries like the dot-coms of the 1990s or new derivative securities created by slicing up and repackaging mortgages. I asked the Caltech economist Charles Plott, one of the pioneers of experimental economics, whether the recent financial crisis might have come from this kind of inexperience. "I think that's a good thesis," he said. With so many new instruments, "it could be that the inexperienced heads are not people but the organizations themselves. The organizations haven't learned how to deal with the risk or identify the risk or understand the risk."

Here the bubble experiments meet up with another large body of experimental research, first developed by Plott and his collaborators. This work explores how speculative markets can pool information from lots of people ("the wisdom of crowds") and arrive at accurate predictions—for example, who's going to win the presidency or the World Series. These markets work, Plott explains, because people with good information rush in early, leading prices to reflect what they know and setting a trajectory that others follow. "It's a kind of cascade, a good cascade, just what should happen," he says. But sometimes the process "can go bananas" and create a bubble, usually when good information is scarce and people follow leaders who don't in fact know much.

That may be what happened on Wall Street, Plott suggests. "Now we have new instruments. We have 'leaders,' who one would ordinarily think know something, getting in there very aggressively and everybody cuing on them—as they have done in the past, and as markets should. But in this case, there might be a bubble." And when you have a bubble, you will get a crash. ■

Virginia Postrel, an Atlantic contributing editor, is editor in chief of *deepglamour.net*.

If experience eliminates bubbles in the lab, you might expect that more-experienced traders in the real world would produce fewer financial crises. But even they can make big mistakes when conditions change.



The Existential Clown

Why Jim Carrey makes us uncomfortable

By James Parker

IN THE YEAR 2038, when we're all living out of corroded Kia Sportages, beneath an ozone layer so threadbare you can toast a slice of bread simply by hanging it out the window, scavengers will make a discovery. In the basement of a ruined midwestern mall they will find, miraculously preserved, a fresco depicting the totemic movie scenes of Jim Carrey: Carrey as Truman Burbank in *The Truman Show*, standing in a private elevator shaft of rainfall on an otherwise dry beach; as Fletcher Reede in *Liar Liar*,

being attacked by the pen in his own hand; as Charlie Baileygates, the schizophrenic highway patrolman of *Me, Myself & Irene*, strangling an enormous cow; as *Bruce Almighty*'s Bruce Nolan, with the power of God in his index finger, causing fire hydrants to pop and the skirts of desirable women to billow up around their waists; and as Ace Ventura, bent over, hands on rump, ventriloquizing through parted butt cheeks. After rubbing at the wall with ragged sleeves, the discoverers will fall back in awe.

And the voice of the tribal priest will be heard, apostrophizing this huge graffito. "Oh, modern man," he will say, in a voice rich with pity. "How lonely you were, and how divided. And how you *loved* to talk out of your ass."

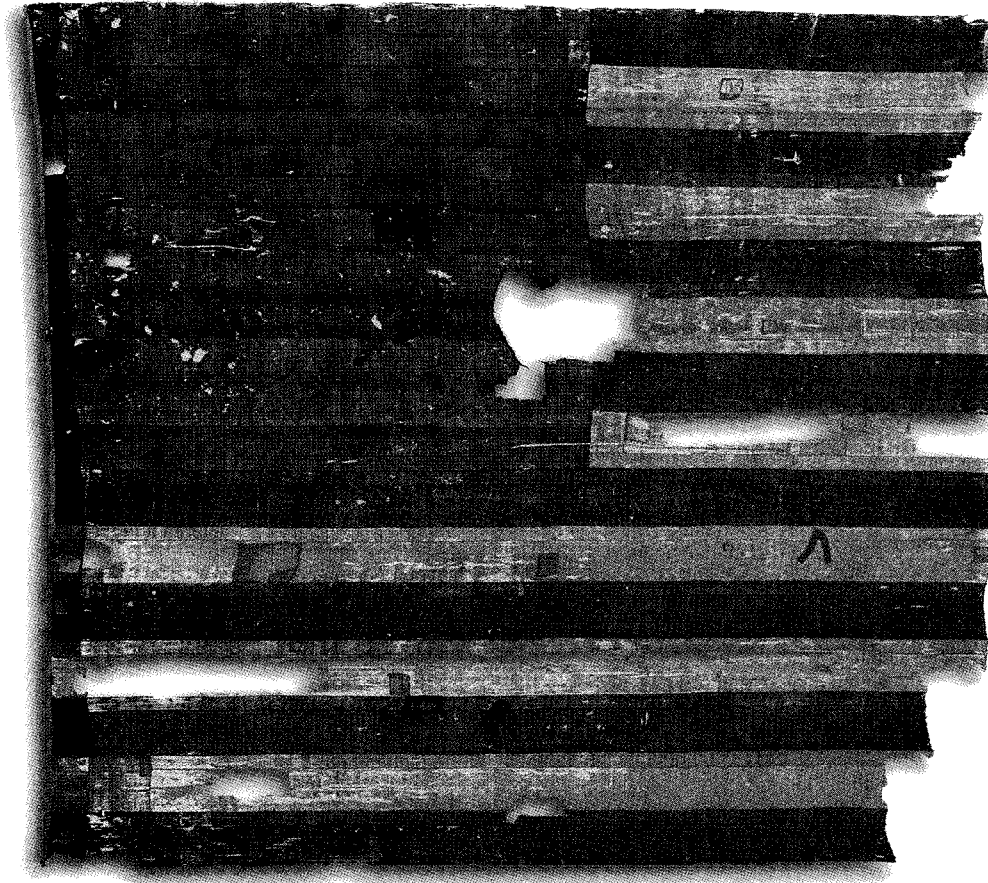
Jim Carrey will loom large in our shattered posterity, I believe, because his filmography amounts to a uniquely sustained engagement with the problem of the self. Who knows how the self became such a problem, or when we began to feel the falseness

MORE ONLINE

For James Parker's commentary on Jim Carrey's filmography, visit www.theatlantic.com/carrey.

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in our nature? "There's another man within me, that's angry with me," wrote Sir Thomas Browne in *Religio Medici*, three and a half centuries before the scene in *Liar Liar* where the hero stuffs his own head into the toilet bowl. Other clowns have risen since Carrey first stormed the multiplexes with *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*—Will Ferrell, Adam Sandler, Ben Stiller, Seth Rogen—but for more than a decade now, he has been the go-to guy for high-concept metaphysics, for Hollywood's sci-fi of the self. How about ... an insurance salesman who discovers that his whole life is an elaborate fiction created by a malign TV producer?! Or—yeah!—a mendacious lawyer compelled to tell the truth for 24 hours?! Or even a blacklisted screenwriter (*The Majestic*) who loses his memory and wakes up to find that everybody thinks he's a war hero?!

Movie after movie finds Carrey either confronting God ("Smite me, O mighty Smiter!" he roars in *Bruce Almighty*) or enacting, violently and outrageously, some version of the dilemma identified by the Spanish existentialist José Ortega y Gasset—that man, as he exists in the world, is "equivalent to an actor bidden to represent the personage which is his real I." One wonders what the French make of him. Here in America, we've been content to regard him as a blockbusting goofball, but in France, beautiful France, where philosophy is king and Jerry Lewis is awarded the Légion d'Honneur, might not they be readying garlands for Jim Carrey?

Yes Man, out this month, is Carrey's latest existential parable. If, as has been speculated, Hans Christian Andersen and Søren Kierkegaard shared a libertine moment in the salons and cellars of 19th-century Copenhagen, they could have brainstormed this movie over drinks. Carrey plays Carl Allen, an office drone and cautious Cuthbert who abruptly starts saying "Yes!" to everything—Korean lessons, cans of Red Bull, love, and life itself. This impulsive assent to existence is characteristically presented in the form of a gift/curse, laid upon Carrey, in this case, by a New Age positivity guru played by Terence Stamp. (The tie-in with Red Bull is a brilliant stroke, of course—no other legal product so generously extends the

promise of turning you, if only for half an hour, into Jim Carrey.)

Leaping into lived truth also gets you the girl: *Yes Man*, like so many Carrey movies, trails off sappily into love. Really, though, where else could it go? To quote Martin Buber: "The world is not comprehensible, but it is embraceable." The point is to commit yourself. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* imagines a pair of lovers, played by Carrey and Kate Winslet, in the heat-death of their togetherness: bored and disgusted, each submits to a disreputable clinical procedure in which the whole relationship is expunged from their memory banks. It works, but somehow, as freshly minted strangers, they meet again; they are drawn to each other; they begin to fall in love. Then the attempt at mutual erasure comes to light: they learn that they have been through all of this already. What to do? In an overlit, discolored hallway, they stare at each other, grim with foreknowledge—and decide to go for it all over again. How beautiful! Ghastly as they look under the fluorescent tubes, the lovers stand together in this instant on a scuffed little summit of human dignity: by embracing their situation (and each other), they have transcended it.

All of which would be the sheerest philosophical prattle if Jim Carrey didn't so consistently, as a performer, *embody* these various propositions. Here, buzzing in his shoulder sockets, is the struggle for authenticity; there, warping his tongue, is the torment of becoming. At his most Carrey-esque, he is always trapped mid-metamorphosis, wrestling visibly with the sort of transformative inner pressure that in another context would produce a superhero—or a man-size cockroach. *The Mask* got it all wrong by making this explicit, by *separating* the character of Stanley Ipkiss, shat-upon bank clerk, from the green-headed, dance-floor-dominating pimp he became when he put on his magic mask. (Jim Carrey with *makeup*? And *special effects*? Jesus, what a waste!)

The Farrelly brothers' *Me, Myself & Irene*, on the other hand, got it exactly right. Charlie Baileygates, Rhode Island state trooper, cuckold, butt of the world, a 6-foot-2-inch walking punch line (like Truman Burbank), goes to confession. "There's something bubbling up inside of me, Father," he whispers fiercely, "and I'm afraid that someday ... I'm gonna explode!" "Where does this rage come from, my son?" murmurs his confessor. "I don't know," Charlie says. "I'm probably just being paranoid here, but I get the feeling that the *entire town* is laughing at me behind my back." The priest leans forward: "Charlie? That you?" When Charlie explodes, there are no gimmicks. A hissing sound, a distension of the jaw, and he has turned into somebody else: it happens, in other words, behind his eyes.

Without violating the singularity of Carrey's achievement, we can acknowledge that he does have his varying modes—that the explosive physical comedian of *Ace Ventura* and *Liar Liar* can be distinguished from the more reined-in and responsible thespian of, say, *The Majestic*. The former is a creature of spurts and

More than all the leaping about, it's his unnerving subversion of regular-guyness that makes Carrey the representative jester of our time.

unevenness, clattering from gag to gag, set piece to set piece. His great scenes, his great fits and flare-ups, come jumping out of his often half-baked movies like spikes on a lie detector or surges on a Ouija board. Chip Douglas, the stalker/parasite/no-man of *The Cable Guy*, is constructed entirely out of such peaks: between the freak-out karaoke version of Jefferson Airplane's "Somebody to Love" and the armored showdown at Medieval Times, he barely exists.

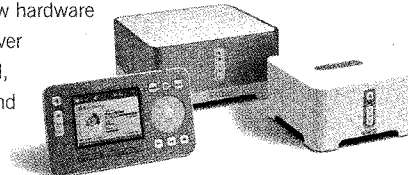
Then there's earnest Carrey, low-voltage Carrey, Carrey the Oscar chaser, dutifully dialing it down for *The Majestic* and muting himself in *The Truman Show*. This Carrey excites a peculiar anxiety: you sit there with your scalp prickling, waiting for him to go off. Which he never does. But Carrey can only play it straight when the rest of the world is crooked—laughing at him, deceiving him, or (as in *The Majestic*) falsely

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accusing him. More than all the leaping about, it's this strange, unnerving subversion or emptying-out of regular-guyiness that makes Carrey the representative jester of our time. That manly grip on normality so prized by your Tom Hankses and your Harrison Fords is for Carrey a wild and desperate bluff. The cheesy jut of his upper teeth, the giant shrugs and nods and lunges of bonhomie, the gargoyle affability—his body is one enormous “tell.” (“Good morning!” yodels Truman Burbank, briefcase in hand. “And in case I don’t see ya, good afternoon, good evening, and good night!”) Carrey’s parodic handsomeness only cranks up the dissonance—the sense that we are witnessing a grotesque accommodation between the individual and the crowd, between the imperatives of an authentic existence and the need to rub along in the day-to-day illusion.

This may also be why plenty of moviegoers (my mother-in-law, for example) will tell you that they cannot stand Jim Carrey. A noisome vacancy at the heart of him, a dreadful resounding

hollowness, repels them—for a man who regularly pulls down \$20 million per picture, his (ahem) “unfavorables” are abnormally high. But they’re getting at the core of his genius, these sensitive souls. Carrey’s dream sequence of movies is a prophecy, a warning that this clanking ego-apparatus in which each of us walks around, this fissured, monumental self, half Job and half Bertie Wooster, cannot be sustained. Out of his own seemingly bottomless disquiet, Carrey writhes and reaches into the bottomless disquiet of his audience. An oracular bum holds up a handwritten cardboard sign in *Bruce Almighty*: LIFE IS JUST. We know we’re frauds; we fear a reckoning is due.

Carrey is the single performer at his level who seems as though he’d be as happy in a Samuel Beckett play as in a summer blockbuster. Beckett would have dug him, I think—the wintry Irishman liked his clowns, the more existential the better. Mask-faced Buster Keaton turned down the role of Lucky in a 1956 production of *Waiting for Godot*, but nine years later Beckett

managed to corral him into an almost-silent film called *Film*. It’s a bleak little work, not unexpectedly—Keaton scurries rodent-like by city walls, his porkpie hat in place but his face scarved and averted, ducking from the glances of passersby and pausing only to take his own pulse. Rare is the Carrey movie that doesn’t feature some comparable scene of evasion or solitary, self-diagnosing crisis.

And what a Lucky he would make! One can see him shuffling, hangdog, compressed, with the rope around his neck, then erupting out of nowhere into Lucky’s famous semi-Pentecostal speech: “... A personal God quaquaquaquaqu outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions...” “Mélée, final vociferations,” wrote Beckett in the stage directions. It’s Carrey in excelsis. Perhaps he could deliver it out of his ass. ■

James Parker is an Atlantic correspondent.



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but at least,
be nice to the countries
that lend you money.
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Talk to the Middle Easterners!
And pull your troops back!”*

—GAO XIQING

From his interview with James Fallows, beginning on page 62

THE MAGNITUDE OF the current bust seems almost unfathomable—and it was unfathomable, to even the most sophisticated financial professionals, until the moment the bubble popped. How could this happen? And what's to stop it from happening again? A former Wall Street insider explains how the financial industry got it so badly wrong, why it always will—and why all of us are to blame.

WHY WALL STREET ALWAYS BLOWS IT

By Henry Blodget

WELL, WE DID it again. Only eight years after the last big financial boom ended in disaster, we're now in the migraine hangover of an even bigger one—a global housing and debt bubble whose bursting has wiped out tens of trillions of dollars of wealth and brought the world to the edge of a second Great Depression.

Millions have lost their houses. Millions more have lost their retirement savings. Tens of millions have had their portfolios smashed. And the carnage in the “real economy” has only just begun.

What the hell happened? After decades of increasing financial sophistication, weren't we supposed to be done with these things? Weren't we supposed to know better?

Yes, of course. Every time this happens, we think it will be the last time. But it never will be.

First things first: for better and worse, I have had more professional experience with financial bubbles than I would ever wish on anyone. During the dot-com episode, as you may unfortunately recall, I was a famous tech-stock analyst at Merrill Lynch. I was famous because I was on the right side of the boom through the late 1990s, when stocks were storming to record-high prices every year—Internet stocks,

especially. By late 1998, I was cautioning clients that “what looks like a bubble probably is,” but this didn't save me. Fifteen months later, I missed the top and drove my clients right over the cliff.

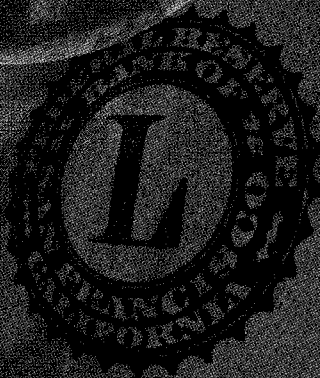
Later, in the smoldering aftermath, as you may also unfortunately recall, I was accused by Eliot Spitzer, then New York's attorney general, of having hung on too long in order to curry favor with the companies I was analyzing, some of which were also Merrill banking clients. This allegation led to my banishment from the industry, though it didn't explain why I had followed my own advice and blown my own portfolio to smithereens (more on this later).

I experienced the next bubble differently—as a journalist and homeowner. Having already learned the most obvious lesson about bubbles, which is that you don't want to get out too late, I now discovered something nearly as obvious: you don't want to get out too early. Figuring that the roaring housing market was just another tech-stock bubble in the making, I rushed to sell my house in 2003—only to watch its price nearly double over the next three years. I also predicted the demise of the Manhattan real-estate market on the cover of *New York* magazine in 2005. Prices are finally falling now, in 2008, but they're still well above where they were then.

Live through enough bubbles, though, and you do eventually learn something of value. For example, I've learned that

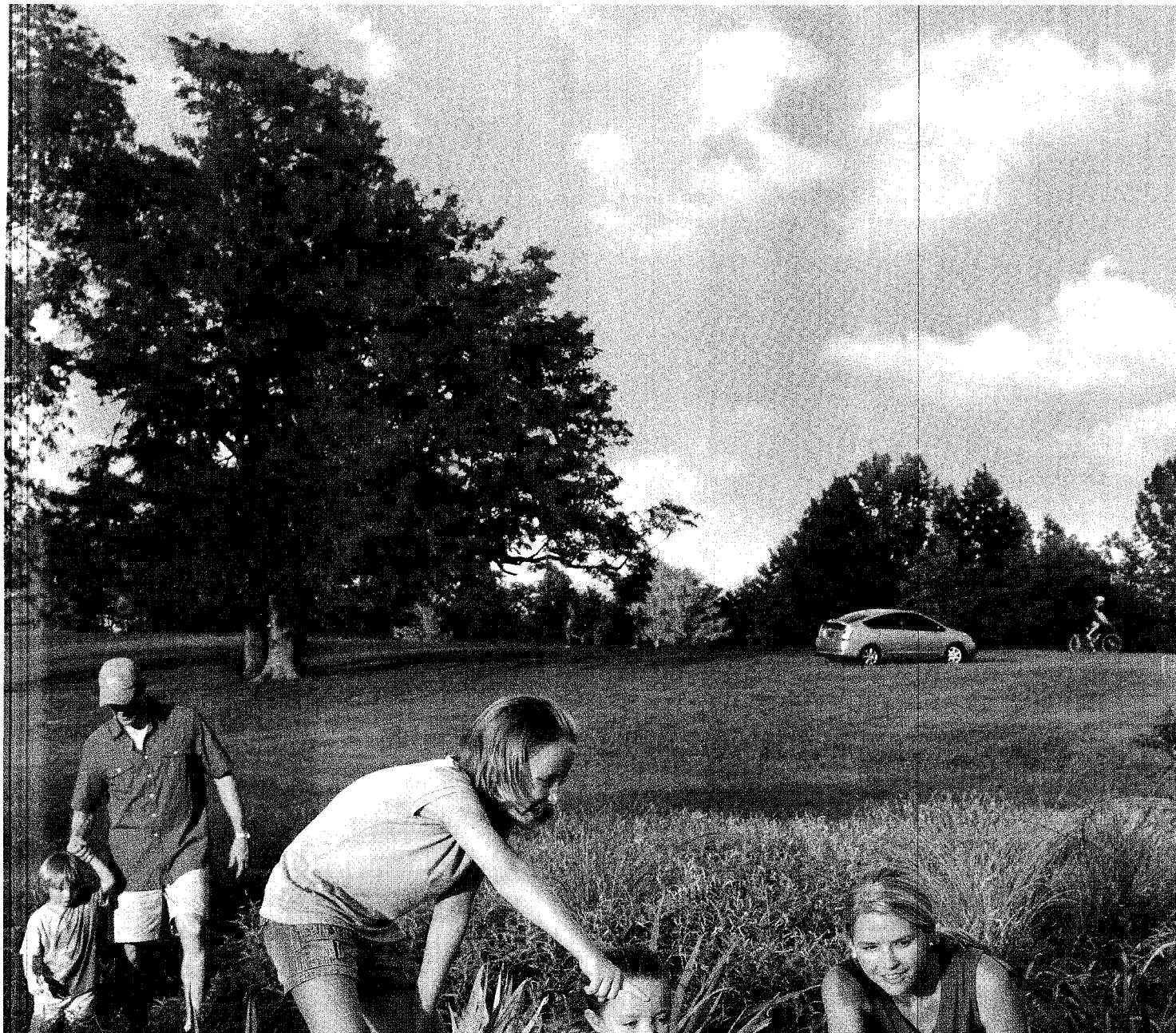
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although getting out too early hurts, it hurts less than getting out too late. More important, I've learned that most of the common wisdom about financial bubbles is wrong.

WHO'S TO BLAME for the current crisis? As usually happens after a crash, the search for scapegoats has been intense, and many contenders have emerged: Wall Street swindled us; predatory lenders sold us loans we couldn't afford; the Securities and Exchange Commission fell asleep at the switch; Alan Greenspan kept interest rates low for too long; short-sellers spread negative rumors; "experts" gave us bad advice. More-introspective folks will add other explanations: we got greedy; we went nuts; we heard what we wanted to hear.

All of these explanations have some truth to them. Predatory lenders did bamboozle some people into loans and houses they couldn't afford. The SEC and other regulators did miss opportunities to curb some of the more egregious behavior. Alan Greenspan did keep interest rates too low for too long (and if you're looking for the single biggest cause of the housing bubble, this is it). Some short-sellers did spread negative rumors. And, Lord knows, many of us got greedy, checked our brains at the door, and heard what we wanted to hear.

But most bubbles are the product of more than just bad faith, or incompetence, or rank stupidity; the interaction of human psychology with a market economy practically ensures that they will form. In this sense, bubbles are perfectly rational—or at least they're a rational and unavoidable by-product of capitalism (which, as Winston Churchill might have said, is the worst economic system on the planet except for all the others). Technology and circumstances change, but the human animal doesn't. And markets are ultimately about people.

To understand why bubble participants make the decisions they do, let's roll back the clock to 2002. The stock-market crash has crushed our portfolios and left us feeling vulnerable, foolish, and poor. We're not wiped out, thankfully, but we're chastened, and we're certainly not going to go blow our extra money on Cisco Systems again. So where should we put it? What's safe? How about a house?

House prices, we are told by our helpful neighborhood real-estate agent, almost never go down. This sounds right, and they certainly didn't go down in the stock-market crash. In fact, for as long as we can remember—about 10 years, in most cases—house prices haven't gone down. (Wait, maybe there was a slight dip, after the 1987 stock-market crash, but looming larger in our memories is what's happened since; everyone we know who's bought a house since the early 1990s has made gobs of money.)

We consider following our agent's advice, but then we decide against it. House prices have doubled since the mid-1990s; we're not going to get burned again by buying at the top. So we decide to just stay in our rent-stabilized rabbit warren and wait for house prices to collapse.

Unfortunately, they don't. A year later, they've risen at least another 10 percent. By 2006, we're walking past neighborhood houses that we could have bought for about half as much four years ago; we wave to happy new neighbors who are already deep in the money. One neighbor has "unlocked the value in his house" by taking out a cheap home-equity loan, and he's using the proceeds to build a swimming pool. He is also doing well, along with two visionary friends, by buying and flipping other houses—so well, in fact, that he's considering quitting his job and becoming a full-time real-estate developer. After four years of resistance, we finally concede—houses might be a good investment after all—and call our neighborhood real-estate agent. She's jammed (and driving a new BMW), but she agrees to fit us in.

We see five houses: two were on the market two years ago for 30 percent less (we just can't handle the pain of that); two are dumps; and the fifth, which we love, is listed at a positively ridiculous price. The agent tells us to hurry—if we don't bid now, we'll lose the house. But we're still hesitant: last week,

we read an article in which some economist was predicting a housing crash, and that made us nervous. (Our agent counters that Greenspan says the housing market's in good shape, and he isn't known as "The Maestro" for nothing.)

When we get home, we call our neighborhood mortgage broker, who gives us a surprisingly reasonable quote—with a surprisingly small down payment. It's a new kind of loan, he says, called an adjustable-rate mortgage, which is the same kind our neighbor has. The payments will "reset" in three years, but, as the mortgage broker suggests, we'll probably have moved up to a bigger house by then. We discuss the house during dinner and breakfast.

We review our finances to make sure we can afford it. Then, the next afternoon, we call the agent to place a bid. And the house is already gone—at 10 percent above the asking price.

By the spring of 2007, we've finally caught up to the market reality, and our luck finally changes: We make an instant, aggressive bid on a huge house, with almost no money down. And we get it! We're finally members of the ownership society.

You know the rest. Eighteen months later, our down payment has been wiped out and we owe more on the house than it's worth. We're still able to make the payments, but our mortgage rate is about to reset. And we've already heard rumors about coming layoffs at our jobs. How on Earth did we get into this mess?

The exact answer is different in every case, of course. But let's round up the usual suspects:

- The predatory mortgage broker? Well, we're certainly not happy with the bastard, given that he sold us a loan that is now a ticking time bomb. But we did ask him to show us a range of options, and he didn't make us pick this one. We picked it because it had the lowest payment.
- Our sleazy real-estate agent? We're not speaking to her anymore, either (and we're secretly stoked that her BMW just got repossessed), but again, she didn't lie to us. She just

**"We will learn
an enormous
amount in a
very short time,
quite a bit in the
medium term,
and absolutely
nothing in the
long term."**

kept saying that houses are usually a good investment. And she is, after all, a saleswoman; that was never very hard to figure out.

- Wall Street fat cats? Boy, do we hate those guys, especially now that our tax dollars are bailing them out. But we didn't complain when our lender asked for such a small down payment without bothering to check how much money we made. At the time, we thought that was pretty great.
- The SEC? We're furious that our government let this happen to us, and we're sure someone is to blame. We're not really sure who that someone is, though. Whoever is responsible for making sure that something like this never happens to us, we guess.
- Alan "The Maestro" Greenspan? We're pissed at him too. If he hadn't been out there saying everything was fine, we might have believed that economist who said it wasn't.
- Bad advice? Hell, yes, we got bad advice. Our real-estate agent. That mortgage guy. Our neighbor. Greenspan. The media. They all gave us horrendous advice. We should have just waited for the market to crash. But everyone said it was different this time.

Still, except in cases involving outright fraud—a small minority—the buck stops with us. Not knowing that the market would crash isn't an excuse. No one *knew* the market would crash, even the analysts who predicted that it would. (Just as important, no one knew when prices would go down, or how fast.) And for years, most of the skeptics looked—and felt—like fools.

Everyone else on that list above bears some responsibility too. But in the case I have described, it would be hard to say that any of them acted criminally. Or irrationally. Or even irresponsibly. In fact, almost everyone on that list acted just the way you would expect them to act under the circumstances.

THAT'S ESPECIALLY TRUE for the professionals on Wall Street, who've come in for more criticism than anyone in recent months, and understandably so. It was Wall Street, after all, that chose not only to feed the housing bubble, but ultimately to bet so heavily on it as to put the entire financial system at risk. How did the experts who are paid to obsess about the direction of the market—allegedly the most financially sophisticated among us—get it so badly wrong? The answer is that the typical financial professional is a lot more like our hypothetical home buyer than anyone on Wall Street would care to admit. Given the intersection of experience, uncertainty, and self-interest within the finance industry, it should be no surprise that Wall Street blew it—or that it will do so again.

Take experience (or the lack thereof). Boom-and-bust cycles like the one we just went through take a long time to complete. The really big busts, in fact, the ones that affect the whole market and economy, are usually separated by more than 30 years—think 1929, 1966, and 2000. (Why did the housing bubble follow the tech bubble so closely? Because both were really just parts of a larger credit bubble, which had been building since the late 1980s. That bubble didn't deflate after the 2000 crash, in part thanks to Greenspan's attempts to save the economy.) By the time the next Great Bubble rolls

GALLERY HOPE by Laurie Rosenwald



around, a lot of us will be as dead and gone as Richard Whitney, Jesse Livermore, Charles Mitchell, and the other giants of the 1929 crash. (Never heard of them? Exactly.)

Since Wall Street replenishes itself with a new crop of fresh faces every year—many of the professionals at the elite firms either flame out or retire by age 40—most of the industry doesn't usually have experience with both booms and busts. In the 1990s, I and thousands of young Wall Street analysts and investors like me hadn't seen anything but a 15-year bull market. The only market shocks that we knew much about—the 1987 crash, say, or Mexico's 1994 financial crisis—had immediately been followed by strong recoveries (and exhortations to "buy the dip").

By 1996, when Greenspan made his famous "irrational exuberance" remark, the stock market's valuation was nearing its

peak from prior bull markets, making some veteran investors nervous. Over the next few years, however, despite confident predictions of doom, stocks just kept going up. And eventually, inevitably, this led to assertions that no peak was in sight, much less a crash—you see, it was “different this time.”

Those are said to be the most expensive words in the English language, by the way: *it's different this time*. You can't have a bubble without good explanations for why it's different this time. If everyone *knew* that this time wasn't different, the market would stop going up. But the future is always uncertain—and amid uncertainty, all sorts of faith-based theories can flourish, even on Wall Street.

In the 1920s, the “differences” were said to be the miraculous new technologies (phones, cars, planes) that would speed the economy, as well as Prohibition, which was supposed to produce an ultra-efficient, ultra-responsible workforce. (Don't laugh: one of the most respected economists of the era, Irving Fisher of Yale University, believed that one.) In the tech bubble of the 1990s, the differences were low interest rates, low inflation, a government budget surplus, the Internet revolution, and a Federal Reserve chairman apparently so divinely talented that he had made the business cycle obsolete. In the housing bubble, they were low interest rates, population growth, new mortgage products, a new

ownership society, and, of course, the fact that “they aren't making any more land.”

In hindsight, it's obvious that all these differences were bogus (they've never made any more land—except in Dubai, which now has its own problems). At the time, however, with prices going up every day, things sure seemed different.

In fairness to the thousands of experts who've snookered themselves throughout the years, a complicating factor is always at work: the ever-present possibility that it really *might* have been different. Everything is obvious only after the crash.

Consider, for instance, the late 1950s, when a tried-and-true “sell signal” started flashing on Wall Street. For the first time in years, stock prices had risen so high that the dividend yield on stocks had fallen below the coupon yield on bonds. To anyone who had been around for a while, this seemed ridiculous: stocks are riskier than bonds, so a rational buyer must be paid more to own them. Wise, experienced investors sold their stocks and waited for this obvious mispricing to correct itself. They're still waiting.

Why? Because that time, it *was* different. There were increasing concerns about inflation, which erodes the value of fixed bond-interest payments. Stocks offer more protection against inflation, so their value relative to bonds had increased. By the time the prudent folks who sold their stocks figured this out, however, they'd missed out on many years of a raging bull market.

When I was on Wall Street, the embryonic Internet sector was different, of course—at least to those of us who were used to buying staid, steady stocks that went up 10 percent in a good year. Most Internet companies didn't have earnings, and some of them barely had revenue. But the performance of some of their stocks was spectacular.

In 1997, I recommended that my clients buy stock in a company called Yahoo; the stock finished the year up more than 500 percent. The next year, I put a \$400-a-share price target on a controversial “online bookseller” called Amazon, worth about \$240 a share at the time; within a month, the stock blasted through \$400 en route to \$600. You don't have to make too many calls like these before people start listening to you; I soon had a global audience keenly interested in whatever I said.

One of the things I said frequently, especially after my Amazon prediction, was that the tech sector's stock behavior sure looked like a bubble. At the end of 1998, in fact, I published a report called “Surviving (and Profiting From) Bubble.com,” in which I listed similarities between the dot-com phenomenon and previous boom-and-bust cycles in biotech, personal computers, and other sectors. But I recommended that my clients own a few high-quality Internet stocks anyway—because of the ways in which I thought the Internet was different. I won't spell out all those ways, but I will say that they sounded less stupid then than they do now.

The bottom line is that resisting the siren call of a boom is much easier when you have already been

BUOYANCY

A swimmer swims out through voids of drypoint, inkwash,
He dives deeper than the artist etching him on the plate
Can follow, he dissolves into blues and blacks, into the hush
Of stone that underlies the waters. And he senses how his fate

Is neither his nor his maker's: who is he that the waters
Should compass him about? Out of sync, in sync,
At the bottom of the sea he finds out his own nature:
Ragged sail; a skim of oil; torn envelopes; a house key blank.

So my swimmer, come back out of the depths,
Remind me how each summer the bottom gives way
To another bottom and another, another ... that whoever keeps
Going down goes down atmosphere by atmosphere, living it day

By day until the whole ocean's bulk balances on
Your shoulders. And now that you've grown
Up and into it, no one but you can question
This buoyancy that weighs you down.

—Tom Sleigh

*Tom Sleigh's most recent collection is Space Walk (2007).
He lives in Brooklyn and teaches at Hunter College.*

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obliterated by one. In the late 1990s, as stocks kept roaring higher, it got easier and easier to believe that something really was different. So, in early 2000, weeks before the bubble burst, I put a lot of money where my mouth was. Two years later, I had lost the equivalent of six high-end college educations.

Of course, as Eliot Spitzer and others would later observe—and as was crystal clear to most Wall Street executives at the time—being bullish in a bull market is undeniably good for business. When the market is rising, no one wants to work with a bear.

WHICH BRINGS US to the last major contributor to booms and busts: self-interest. When people look back on bubbles, many conclude that the participants must have gone stark raving mad. In most cases, nothing could be further from the truth.

In my example from the housing boom, for instance, each participant's job was not to predict what the housing market would do but to accomplish a more concrete aim. The buyer wanted to buy a house; the real-estate agent wanted to earn a commission; the mortgage broker wanted to sell a loan; Wall Street wanted to buy loans so it could package and resell them as "mortgage-backed securities"; Alan Greenspan wanted to keep American prosperity alive; members of Congress wanted to get reelected. None of these participants, it is important to note, was paid to predict the likely future movements of the housing market. In every case (except, perhaps, the buyer's), that was, at best, a minor concern.

This does not make the participants villains or morons. It does, however, illustrate another critical component of boom-time decision-making: the difference between investment risk and career or business risk.

Professional fund managers are paid to manage money for their clients. Most managers succeed or fail based not on how much money they make or lose but on how much they make or lose *relative to the market and other fund managers*.

If the market goes up 20 percent and your Fidelity fund goes up only 10 percent, for example, you probably won't call Fidelity and say, "Thank you." Instead, you'll probably call and say, "What am I paying you people for, anyway?" (Or at least that's what a lot of investors do.) And if this performance continues for a while, you might eventually fire Fidelity and hire a new fund manager.

On the other hand, if your Fidelity fund declines in value but the market drops even more, you'll probably stick with the fund for a while ("Hey, at least I didn't lose as much as all those suckers in index funds"). That is, until the market drops so much that you can't take it anymore and you sell everything, which is what a lot of people did in October, when the Dow plunged below 9,000.

In the money-management business, therefore, investment risk is the risk that your bets will cost *your clients* money. Career or business risk, meanwhile, is the risk that your bets will cost *you or your firm* money or clients.

The tension between investment risk and business risk often leads fund managers to make decisions that, to outsiders, seem bizarre. From the fund managers' perspective, however, they're perfectly rational.

In the late 1990s, while I was trying to figure out whether it was different this time, some of the most legendary fund managers in the industry were struggling. Since 1995, any fund managers who had been bearish had not been viewed as "wise" or "prudent"; they had been viewed as "wrong." And because being wrong meant underperforming, many had been shown the door.

It doesn't take very many of these firings to wake other financial professionals up to the fact that being bearish and wrong is at least as risky as being bullish and wrong. The ultimate judge of who is "right" and "wrong" on Wall Street, moreover, is the market, which posts its verdict day after day, month after month, year after year. So over time, in a long bull market, most of the bears get weeded out, through either attrition or capitulation.

By mid-1999, with mountains of money being made in tech stocks, fund owners were more impatient than ever: their friends were getting rich in Cisco, so their fund manager had better own Cisco—or he or she was an idiot. And if the fund manager thought Cisco was overvalued and was eventually going to crash? Well, in those years, fund managers usually approached this type of problem in one of three ways: they refused to play; they played and tried to win; or they split the difference.

In the first camp was an iconic hedge-fund manager named Julian Robertson. For almost two decades, Robertson's Tiger Management had racked up annual gains of about 30 percent by, as he put it, buying the best stocks and shorting the worst. (One of the worst, in Robertson's opinion, was Amazon, and he used to summon me to his office and demand to know why everyone else kept buying it.)

By 1998, Robertson was short Amazon and other tech stocks, and by 2000, after the NASDAQ had jumped an astounding 86 percent the previous year, Robertson's business and reputation had been mauled. Thanks to poor performance and investor withdrawals, Tiger's assets under management had collapsed from about \$20 billion to about \$6 billion, and the firm's revenues had collapsed as well. Robertson refused to change his stance, however, and in the spring of 2000, he threw in the towel: he closed Tiger's doors and began returning what was left of his investors' money.

Across town, meanwhile, at Soros Fund Management, a similar struggle was taking place, with another titanic fund manager's reputation on the line. In 1998, the firm had gotten crushed as a result of its bets against technology stocks (among other reasons). Midway through 1999, however, the manager of Soros's Quantum Fund, Stanley Druckenmiller, reversed that position and went long on technology. Why? Because unlike Robertson, Druckenmiller viewed it as his job to make money no matter what the market was doing, not to insist that the market was wrong.

At first, the bet worked: the reversal saved 1999 and got 2000 off to a good start. But by the end of April, Quantum was down a shocking 22 percent for the year, and Druckenmiller had resigned: "We thought it was the eighth inning, and it was the ninth."

Robertson and Druckenmiller stuck to their guns and played the extremes (and lost). Another fund manager, a man I'll call the Pragmatist, split the difference.



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The Pragmatist had owned tech stocks for most of the 1990s, and their spectacular performance had made his fund famous and his firm rich. By mid-1999, however, the Pragmatist had seen a bust in the making and begun selling tech, so his fund had started to underperform. Just one quarter later, his boss, tired of watching assets flow out the door, suggested that the Pragmatist reconsider his position on tech. A quarter after that, his boss made it simpler for him: buy tech, or you're fired.

The Pragmatist thought about quitting. But he knew what would happen if he did: his boss would hire a 25-year-old gunslinger who would immediately load up the fund with tech stocks. The Pragmatist also thought about refusing to follow the order. But that would mean he would be fired for cause (no severance or bonus), and his boss would hire the same 25-year-old gunslinger.

In the end, the Pragmatist compromised. He bought enough tech stocks to pacify his boss but not enough to entirely wipe out his fund holders if the tech bubble popped. A few months later, when the market crashed and the fund got hammered, he took his bonus and left the firm.

This tension between investment risk and career or business risk comes into play in other areas of Wall Street too. It was at the center of the decisions made in the past few years by half a dozen seemingly brilliant CEOs whose firms no longer exist.

Why did Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, AIG, and the rest of an ever-growing Wall Street hall of shame take so much risk that they ended up blowing their firms to kingdom come? Because in a bull market, when you borrow and bet \$30 for every \$1 you have in capital, as many firms did, you can do mind-bogglingly well. And when your competitors are betting the same \$30 for every \$1, and your shareholders are demanding that you do better, and your bonus is tied to how much money your firm makes—not over the long term, but this year, before December 31—the downside to refusing to ride the bull market comes into sharp relief. And when naysayers have been so wrong for so long, and your risk-management people assure you that you're in good shape unless we have another Great Depression (which we won't, of course, because it's different this time), well, you can easily convince yourself that disaster is a possibility so remote that it's not even worth thinking about.

It's easy to lay the destruction of Wall Street at the feet of the CEOs and directors, and the bulk of the responsibility does lie with them. But some of it lies with shareholders and the whole model of public ownership. Wall Street never has been—and likely never will be—paid primarily for capital preservation. However, in the days when Wall Street firms were funded primarily by capital contributed by individual partners, preserving that capital in the long run was understandably a higher priority than it is today. Now Wall Street firms are primarily owned not by partners with personal capital at risk but by demanding institutional shareholders examining short-term results. When your fiduciary duty is to manage the firm for the benefit of your shareholders, you can easily persuade yourself that you're just balancing risk and reward—when what you're really doing is betting the firm.

AS WE WORK our way through the wreckage of this latest colossal bust, our government—at our urging—will go to great lengths to try to make sure such a bust never happens again. We will “fix” the “problems” that we decide caused the debacle; we will create new regulatory requirements and systems; we will throw a lot of people in jail. We will do whatever we must to assure ourselves that it will be different next time. And as long as the searing memory of this disaster is fresh in the public mind, it *will* be different. But as the bust recedes into the past, our priorities will slowly change, and we will begin to set ourselves up for the next great boom.

A few decades hence, when the Great Crash of 2008 is a distant memory and the economy is humming along again, our government—at our urging—will begin to weaken many of the regulatory requirements and systems we put in place now. Why? To make our economy more competitive and to unleash the power of our free-market system. We will tell ourselves it's different, and in many ways, it will be. But the cycle will start all over again.

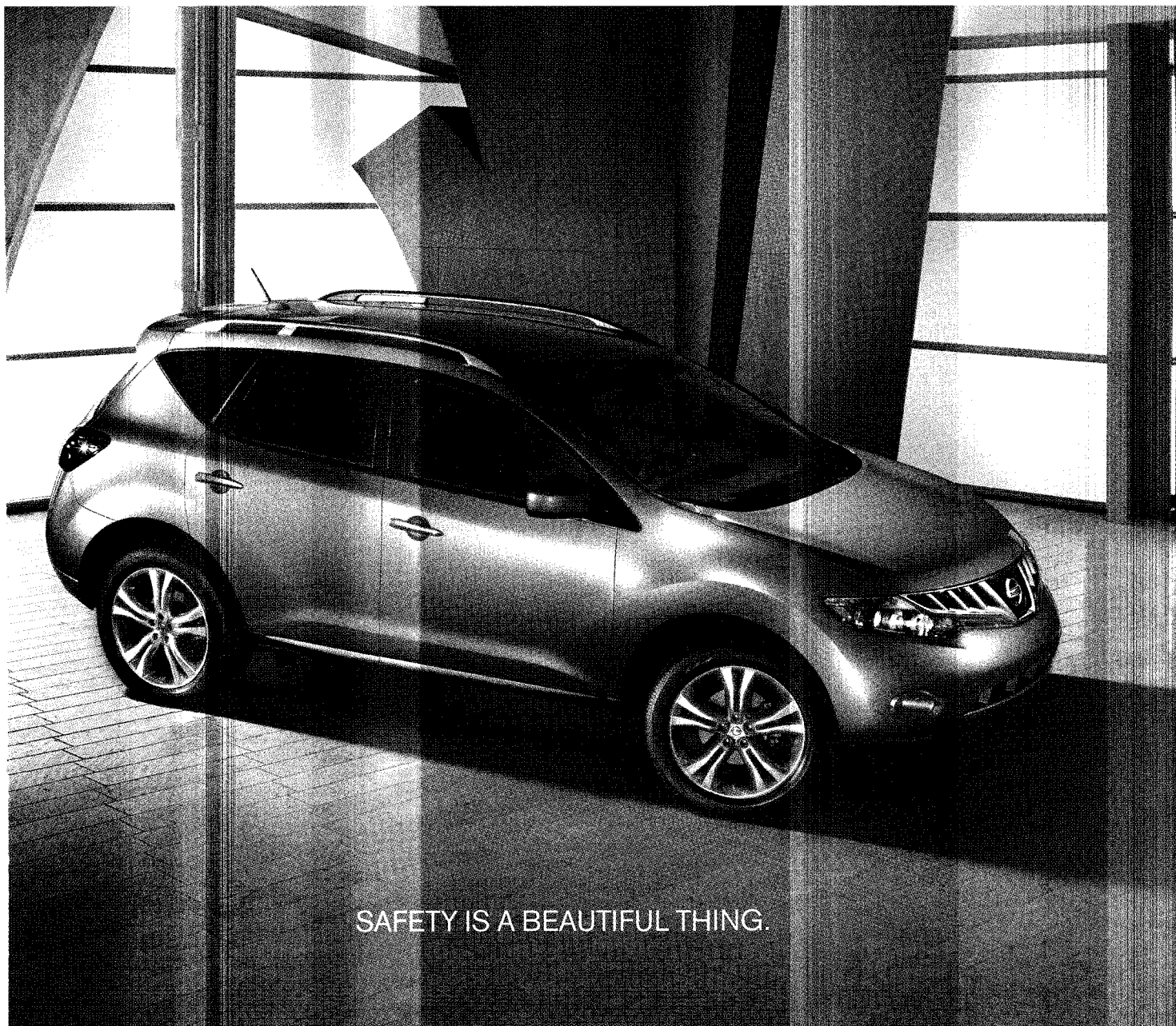
So what can we learn from all this? In the words of the great investor Jeremy Grantham, who saw this collapse coming and has seen just about everything else in his four-decade career: “We will learn an enormous amount in a very short time, quite a bit in the medium term, and absolutely nothing in the long term.” Of course, to paraphrase Keynes, in the long term, you and I will be dead. Until that time comes, here are three thoughts I hope we all can keep in mind.

First, bubbles are to free-market capitalism as hurricanes are to weather: regular, natural, and unavoidable. They have happened since the dawn of economic history, and they'll keep happening for as long as humans walk the Earth, no matter how we try to stop them. We can't legislate away the business cycle, just as we can't eliminate the self-interest that makes the whole capitalist system work. We would do ourselves a favor if we stopped pretending we can.

Second, bubbles and their aftermaths aren't all bad: the tech and Internet bubble, for example, helped fund the development of a global medium that will eventually be as central to society as electricity. Likewise, the latest bust will almost certainly lead to a smaller, poorer financial industry, meaning that many talented workers will go instead into other careers—that's probably a healthy rebalancing for the economy as a whole. The current bust will also lead to at least some regulatory improvements that endure; the carnage of 1933, for example, gave rise to many of our securities laws and to the SEC, without which this bust would have been worse.

Lastly, we who have had the misfortune of learning firsthand from this experience—and in a bust this big, that group includes just about everyone—can take pains to make sure that we, personally, never make similar mistakes again. Specifically, we can save more, spend less, diversify our investments, and avoid buying things we can't afford. Most of all, a few decades down the road, we can raise an eyebrow when our children explain that we really should get in on the new new thing because, yes, it's different this time. ■

Henry Blodget is the editor of Silicon Alley Insider, an online business publication.



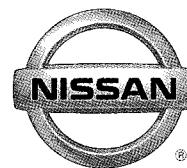
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IN HIS FIRST interview since the world financial crisis, Gao Xiqing, the man who oversees \$200 billion of China's \$2 trillion in dollar holdings, explains why he's betting against the dollar, praises American pragmatism, and wonders about enormous Wall Street paychecks. And he has a friendly piece of advice:

"BE NICE TO THE COUNTRIES THAT LEND YOU MONEY"

By James Fallows

Americans know that China has financed much of their nation's public and private debt. During the presidential campaign, Barack Obama and John McCain generally agreed on the peril of borrowing so heavily from this one foreign source. For instance, in their final debate, McCain warned about the "\$10 trillion debt we're giving to our kids, a half a trillion dollars we owe China," and Obama said, "Nothing is more important than us no longer borrowing \$700 billion or more from China and sending it to Saudi Arabia." Their numbers on the debt differed, and both were way low. One year ago, when I wrote about China's U.S. dollar holdings, the article was called "The \$1.4 Trillion Question." When Barack Obama takes office, the figure will be well over \$2 trillion.

During the late stages of this year's campaign, I had several chances to talk with the man who oversees many of China's American holdings. He is Gao Xiqing, president of the China Investment Corporation, which manages "only" about \$200 billion of the country's foreign assets but makes most of the high-visibility investments, like buying stakes in Blackstone and Morgan Stanley, as opposed to just holding Treasury notes.

Gao, whom I mentioned in my article, would fit no American's preexisting idea of a Communist Chinese official. He

speaks accented but fully colloquial and very high-speed English. He has a law degree from Duke, which he earned in the 1980s after working as a lawyer and professor in China, and he was an associate in Richard Nixon's former Wall Street law firm. His office, in one of the more tasteful new glass-walled high-rises in Beijing, itself seems less Chinese than internationally "fusion"-minded in its aesthetic and furnishings. Bonsai trees in large pots, elegant Japanese-looking arrangements of individual smooth stones on display shelves, Chinese and Western financial textbooks behind the desk, with a photo of Martin Luther King Jr. perched among the books. Two very large, very thin desktop monitors read out financial data from around the world. As we spoke, Western classical music played softly from a good sound system.

Gao dressed and acted like a Silicon Valley moneyman rather than one from Wall Street—open-necked tattersall shirt, muted plaid jacket, dark slacks, scuffed walking shoes. Rimless glasses. His father was a Red Army officer who was on the Long March with Mao. As a teenager during the Cultural Revolution, Gao worked on a railroad-building gang and in an ammunition factory. He is 55, fit-looking, with crew-cut hair and a jokey demeanor rather than an air of sternness.

His comments below are from our one on-the-record discussion, two weeks before the U.S. elections. As I transcribed



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his words, I realized that many will look more astringent on the page than they sounded when coming from him. In person, he seemed to be relying on shared experience in the United States—that is, his and mine—to entitle him to criticize the country the way its own people might. The conversation was entirely in English. Because Gao's answers tended to be long, I am not presenting them in straight Q&A form but instead grouping his comments about his main recurring themes.

Does America wonder who its new Chinese banking overlords might be? This is what one of the very most influential of them had to say about the world financial crisis, what is wrong with Wall Street, whether one still-poor country with tremendous internal needs could continue subsidizing a still-rich one, and how he thought America could adjust to its "realistic" place in the world. My point for the moment is to convey what it is like to hear from such a man, rather than to expand upon, challenge, or agree with his stated views.

About the financial crisis of 2008, which eliminated hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of savings that the Chinese government had extracted from its people, through deliberately suppressed consumption levels:

We are not quite at the bottom yet. Because we don't really know what's going to happen next. Everyone is saying, "Oh, look, the dollar is getting stronger!" [As it was when we spoke.] I say, that's really temporary. It's simply because a lot of people need to cash in, they need U.S. dollars in order to pay back their creditors. But after a short while, the dollar may be going down again. I'd like to bet on that!

The overall financial situation in the U.S. is changing, and that's what we don't know about. It's going to be changed fundamentally in many ways.

Think about the way we've been living the past 30 years. Thirty years ago, the leverage of the investment banks was like 4-to-1, 5-to-1. Today, it's 30-to-1. This is not just a change of numbers. This is a change of fundamental thinking.

People, especially Americans, started believing that they can live on other people's money. And more and more so. First other people's money in your own country. And then the savings rate comes down, and you start living on other people's money from outside. At first it was the Japanese. Now the Chinese and the Middle Easterners.

We—the Chinese, the Middle Easterners, the Japanese—we can see this too. Okay, we'd love to support you guys—if it's sustainable. But if it's not, why should we be doing this? After we are gone, you cannot just go to the moon to get more money. So, forget it. Let's change the way of living. [By which he meant: less debt, lower rewards for financial wizardry, more attention to the "real economy," etc.]

About stock market derivatives and their role as source of evil:

If you look at every one of these [derivative] products, they make sense. But in aggregate, they are bullshit. They are crap. They serve to cheat people.

I was predicting this many years ago. In 1999 or 2000, I gave a talk to the State Council [China's main ruling body], with Premier Zhu Rongji. They wanted me to explain about capital markets and how they worked. These were all ministers and

mostly not from a financial background. So I wondered, *How do I explain derivatives?*, and I used the model of mirrors.

First of all, you have this book to sell. [He picks up a leather-bound book.] This is worth something, because of all the labor and so on you put in it. But then someone says, "I don't have to sell the book itself! I have a mirror, and I can sell the mirror image of the book!" Okay. That's a stock certificate. And then someone else says, "I have another mirror—I can sell a mirror image of that mirror." Derivatives. That's fine too, for a while. Then you have 10,000 mirrors, and the image is almost perfect. People start to believe that these mirrors are almost the real thing. But at some point, the image is interrupted. And all the rest will go.

When I told the State Council about the mirrors, they all started laughing. "How can you sell a mirror image! Won't there be distortion?" But this is what happened with the American economy, and it will be a long and painful process to come down.

I think we should do an overhaul and say, "Let's get rid of 90 percent of the derivatives." Of course, that's going to be very unpopular, because many people will lose jobs.

About Wall Street jobs, wealth, and the cultural distortion of America:

I have to say it: you have to do something about pay in the financial system. People in this field have way too much money. And this is not right.

When I graduated from Duke [in 1986], as a first-year lawyer, I got \$60,000. I thought it was astronomical! I was making somewhere a bit more than \$80,000 when I came back to China in 1988. And that first month's salary I got in China, on a little slip of paper, was 59 yuan. A few dollars! With a few yuan deducted for my rent and my water bill. I laughed when I saw it: 59 yuan!

The thing is, we are working as hard as, if not harder than, those people. And we're not stupid. Today those people fresh out of law school would get \$130,000, or \$150,000. It doesn't sound right.

Individually, everyone needs to be compensated. But collectively, this directs the resources of the country. It distorts the talents of the country. The best and brightest minds go to lawyering, go to M.B.A.s. And that affects our country, too! Many of the brightest youngsters come to me and say, "Okay, I want to go to the U.S. and get into business school, or law school." I say, "Why? Why not science and engineering?" They say, "Look at some of my primary-school classmates. Their IQ is half of mine, but they're in finance and now they're making all this money." So you have all these clever people going into financial engineering, where they come up with all these complicated products to sell to people.

About the \$700 billion U.S. financial-rescue plan enacted in October:

Finally, after months and months of struggling with your own ideology, with your own pride, your self-righteousness ... finally [the U.S. applied] one of the great gifts of Americans, which is that you're pragmatic. Now our people are joking that we look at the U.S. and see "socialism with American characteristics." [The Chinese term for its mainly

capitalist market-opening of the last 30 years is “socialism with Chinese characteristics.”]

It is joking, and many people are saying: “No, Americans still believe in free capitalism and they think this is just a hiccup.” This is like our great leader Deng Xiaoping, who said that it doesn’t matter if the cat is white or black, as long as it catches the mouse. It doesn’t matter what we call this. It’s pragmatic.

With so much of China’s money at stake, did U.S. officials consult the Chinese about the rescue plan?

Not directly. We were talking to people there, and they were hoping that we would be supportive by not pulling out our money. We know that by pulling out money, we’re not serving anyone’s good. Including ourselves. [This is the famous modern “balance of financial terror.” If Chinese officials started pulling assets out of the U.S. and touched off a run on the dollar, their vast remaining dollar holdings would plummet in value.] So we’re trying to help, at least by not aggravating the problem.

But I think at the end of the day, the American government needs to talk with people and say: “Why don’t we get together and think about this? If China has \$2 trillion, Japan has almost \$2 trillion, and Russia has some, and all the others, then—let’s throw away the ideological differences and think about what’s good for everyone.” We can get all the relevant people together and think up what people are calling a second Bretton Woods system, like the first Bretton Woods convention did.

On what might make the Chinese government start taking its dollars out of America (I began the question by saying that China would hurt itself by pulling out dollar assets—at which he interjected, “in the short term”—and then asked about the long-term view):

Today when we look at all the markets, the U.S. still is probably the most viable, the most predictable. I was trained as a lawyer, and predictability is always very important for me.

We have a PR department, which collects all the comments about us, from Chinese newspapers and the Web. Every night, I try to pick a time when I’m in a relatively good mood to read it, because most of the comments are very critical of us. Recently we increased our holdings in Blackstone a little bit. Now we’re increasing a little bit our holdings in Morgan Stanley, so as not to be diluted by the Japanese. People here *hate* it. They come out and say, “Why the hell are you trying to save those people? You are the representative of the poor people eating porridge, and you’re saving people eating shark fins!” It’s always that sort of thing.

And how should Americans feel about the growing Chinese presence in their economy? Isn’t it natural for them to worry that China will keep increasing its stake in American debt and assets—or that China won’t, essentially cutting America off?

I can understand why Americans might feel that way. But, talking with my lawyer head once again, it’s not relevant to discuss how Americans “should” think. We should discuss how Americans might think.

This concern is not really about China itself. It could be any country. It could be Japan, or Germany. This generation of Americans is so used to your supremacy. Your being treated nicely by everyone. It hurts to think, *Okay, now we have to be on equal footing to other people.* “On equal footing” would necessarily mean that sometimes you have to stoop to appear to be humble to other people.

And you can’t think as a soldier. You put yourself at the enemy end of everyone. I grew up during the Cultural Revolution, when people really treated other people like enemies. I grew up in an environment where our friends, our relatives, people I called Uncle or Auntie, could turn around and put a nasty face to me as a small child. One time, Vladimir Lenin told Gorky, after reading Gorky’s autobiography, “Oh my god! You could have become a very nasty person!” Those are exactly the words one of my dear professors told me after hearing what I went through.

But over the years, I believe I learned to be humble. To treat other people nicely. I learned that, from a social point of view, no matter how lowly statured a person you are talking to, as a person, they are the same human being as you are. You have to respect them. You have to apologize if you inadvertently hurt them. And often you have to go out of your way to be nice to them, because they will not like you simply because of the difference in social structure.

Americans are not sensitive in that regard. I mean, as a whole. The simple truth today is that your economy is built on the global economy. And it’s built on the support, the gratuitous support, of a lot of countries. So why don’t you come over and ... I won’t say *kowtow* [with a laugh], but at least, *be nice* to the countries that lend you money.

Talk to the Chinese! Talk to the Middle Easterners! And pull your troops back! Take the troops back, demobilize many of the troops, so that you can save some money rather than spending \$2 billion every day on them. And then tell your people that you need to save, and come out with a long-term, sustainable financial policy.

Although Gao has frequently mentioned Chairman Mao’s maxim—“Go with the Republicans. They’re predictable!”—he obviously was hoping for a “change” agenda under the Democrats:

The current conditions can’t go on. It is time for the new government, under Obama or even McCain, to really tell people: “Look, this is wartime, this is about the survival of our nation. It’s not about our supremacy in the world. Let’s not even talk about that any more. Let’s get down to the very basics of our livelihood.”

I have great admiration of American people. Creative, hard-working, trusting, and freedom-loving. But you have to have someone to tell you the truth. And then, start realizing it. And if you do it, just like what you did in the Second World War, then you’ll be great again!

If that happens, then of course—American power would still be there for at least as long as I am living. But many people are betting on the other side. ■

James Fallows is an Atlantic national correspondent; his blog is at jamesfallows.theatlantic.com.

Iceland's Meltdown

AN ECONOMIC MORALITY PLAY,
IN 10 ACTS

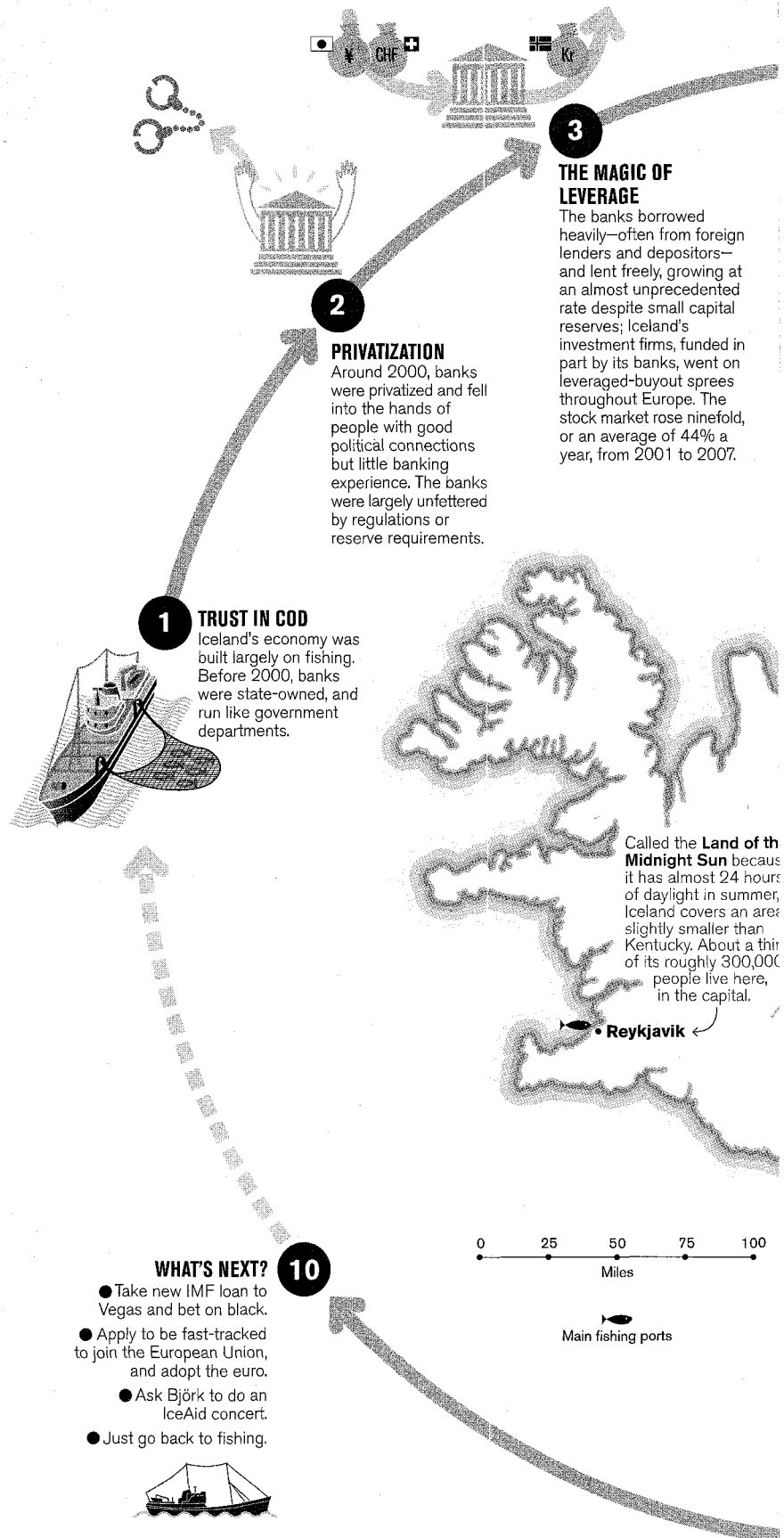
By Nigel Holmes and Megan McArdle

ALL FINANCIAL INNOVATION involves ... the creation of debt secured in greater or lesser adequacy by real assets," wrote the economist John Kenneth Galbraith in 1993. And "all crises have involved debt that, in one fashion or another, has become dangerously out of scale in relation to the underlying means of payment."

Iceland's neophyte bankers no doubt wish they'd paid more attention to this warning. In the past two months, many countries have seen their banks brought low by excess leverage, but none has been punished so thoroughly as Iceland, where the currency and the government's credit rating have joined the banking system on the ash heap of history. "Too big to fail" turned into "too big to save"—the banks' holdings were so large relative to Iceland's economy that the government had no credibility as a lender of last resort. The economy looks likely to shrink by 10 percent this year, and future growth may not be enough to cover the interest on the massive foreign loans that Iceland needs simply to keep functioning.

Notably, Iceland's financial industry had little exposure to American subprime mortgages. In this, Iceland serves as an important reminder: ultimately, leverage, more than houses, is to blame for the severity of the international financial crisis. And leverage is what regulators worldwide will need to tackle as we seek to clean up the mess. **A**

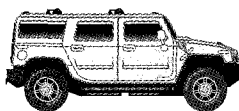
Nigel Holmes is a graphic designer. Megan McArdle, an Atlantic associate editor, blogs at meganmcardle.theatlantic.com.



4

PARTY!

In just five years, the average family's wealth grew by almost half, and Icelanders became the world's most affluent people. Betting that the good times would continue, households amassed debts of up to 213% of their disposable income (in the U.S., that figure is about 140%).



5

CHEAP FOREIGN CREDIT

As debt rose, so did interest rates at home. To finance their new houses and cars, many people took out big loans from foreign banks, denominated in foreign currencies—yen or Swiss francs. These loans offered lower initial interest rates, and as long as the krona stayed strong against these currencies, payments would remain cheap and easy.

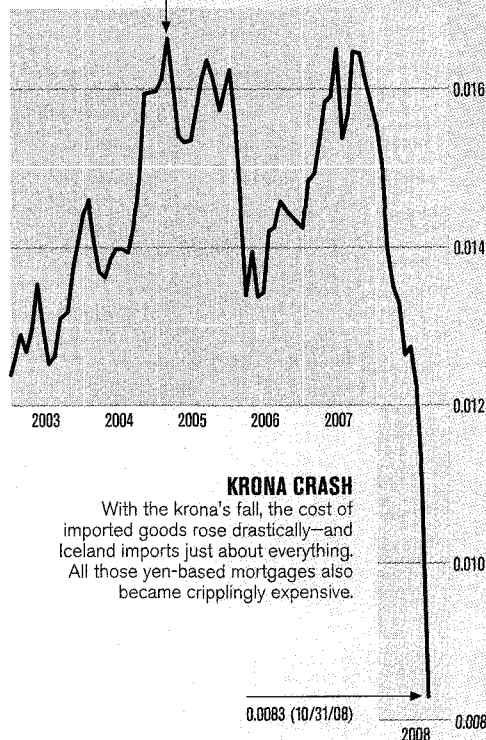
THE SQUEEZE

6

This year, as concerns about financial solvency worldwide grew, foreign banks and investors noticed two things: Iceland's banks were highly leveraged; and they'd grown so big that Iceland's comparatively tiny government might not be able to save them in a pinch. So lenders stopped lending, and traders started betting against Iceland's economy. In the first 10 months of 2008, the krona fell 43% against the dollar.

U.S. dollar/Icelandic krona exchange rate

High point: 0.0166 (3/05)

**KRONA CRASH**

With the krona's fall, the cost of imported goods rose drastically—and Iceland imports just about everything. All those yen-based mortgages also became crippling expensive.

NATIONALIZATION AND MELTDOWN

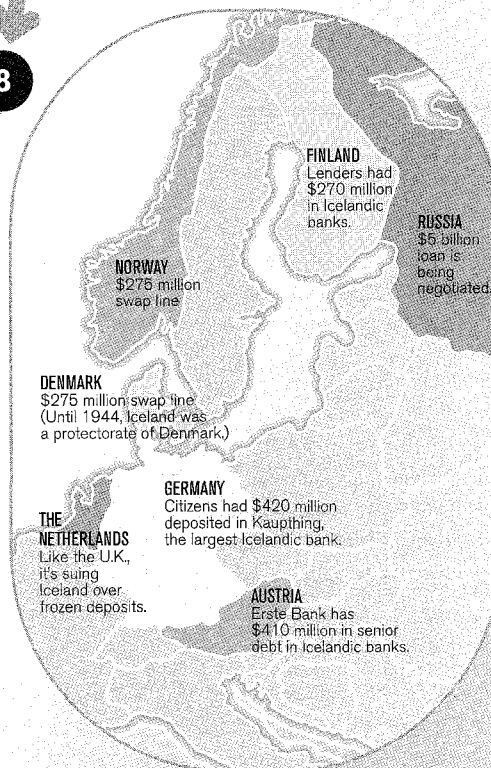
After the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy, interbank lending froze completely. Iceland's three largest banks were teetering—their liabilities equaling about 10 times the national GDP—and the government nationalized them. As a result, the national debt was downgraded, the stock market was temporarily shut down, and the krona ceased to function as an international currency (no one would buy it).

7

WE ARE ALL ICELANDERS ...

As European depositors in Iceland's banks wondered whether they'd get their money back, Iceland's government set up "swap lines" (temporary reciprocal currency arrangements) totaling about \$550 million with Norway and Denmark, and tried to secure a \$5 billion loan from Russia. Eventually, the IMF offered a loan of \$2 billion.

8



9

... WELL, NOT ALL OF US

Meanwhile, the U.K., upset that its depositors might not be repaid, kept Icelandic bank assets totaling \$6.8 billion frozen, having earlier invoked an anti-terrorism law to freeze them in the first place. In addition to individual savers, British local authorities have more than \$1.3 billion in Icelandic banks.

THE INVESTIGATION INTO the 2005 assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri is nearing its end—and a trial in international court looms. Insiders say the trail of evidence leads, ultimately, to the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. But having spent three years fearing for their lives, the investigators are now grappling with a different fear: that Western concerns about regional stability will prevent the naming of the biggest names. Inside the investigation that could blow up the Middle East

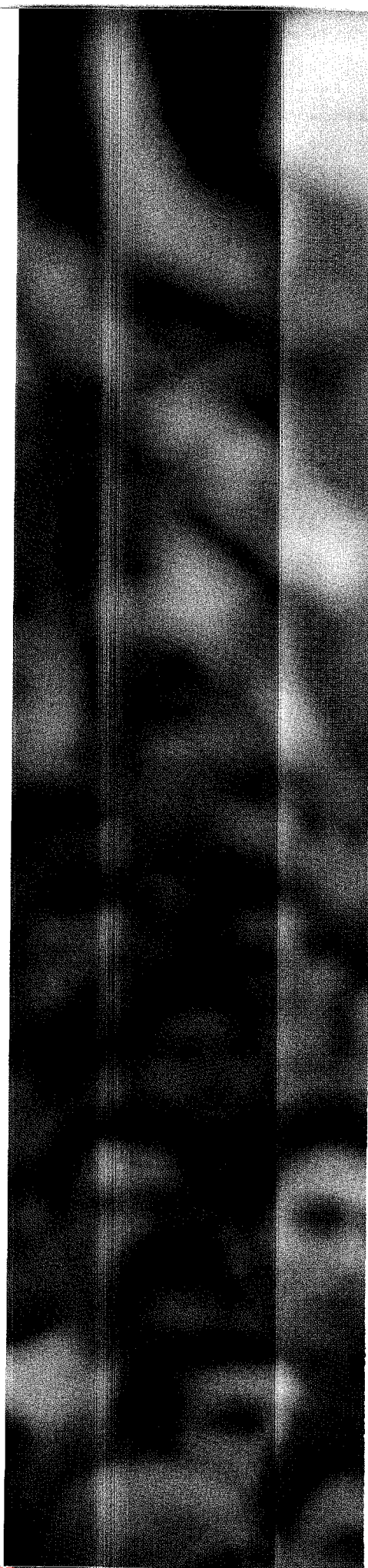
GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER?

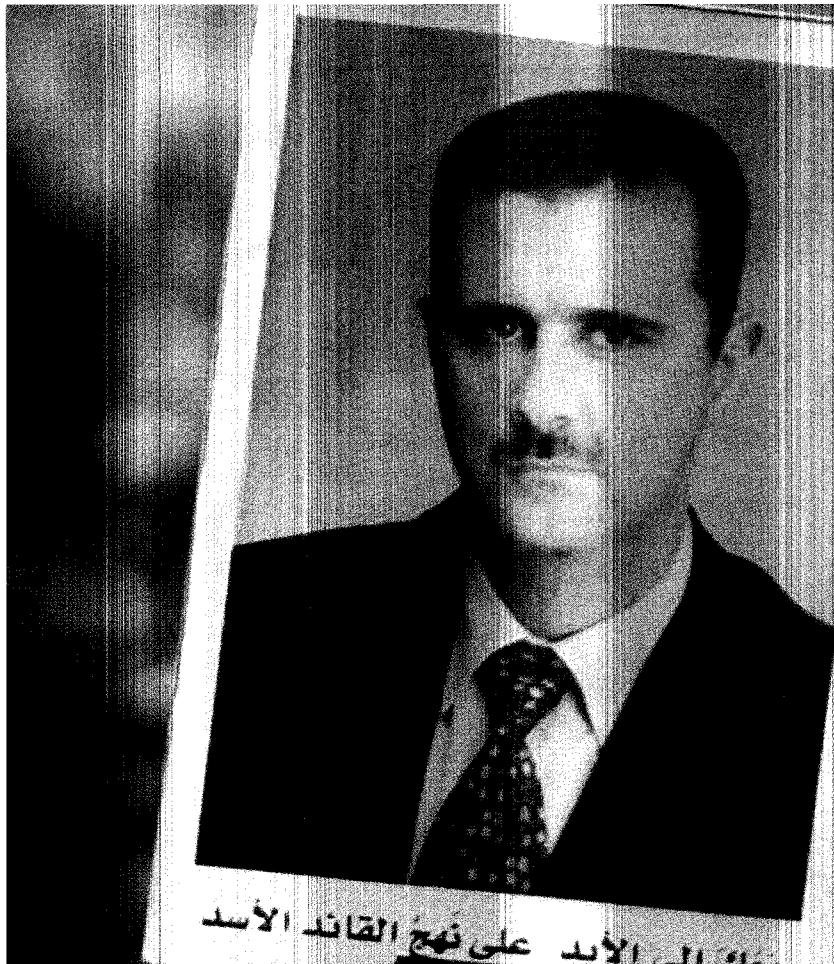
By Joshua Hammer

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KATE BROOKS

ONE SWELTERING AFTERNOON in early July, I drove east out of Beirut to visit the headquarters of the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission, the group probing the murder of Rafiq al-Hariri, the Lebanese billionaire and former prime minister. I followed a road that wound through pine forests, climbing to the top of a ridge in the Mount Lebanon range, until I reached a roadblock manned by the Lebanese army. ZONE DE HAUTE SÉCURITÉ, proclaimed the signs before the sandbagged checkpoint. Down below, tucked away in a steep gorge and half-obscured behind unfinished apartment blocks, stood the Monteverde Hotel, a faded resort that once served as a summer getaway for middle-class Beirutis. The UN took over the complex in the summer of 2005, shortly after Hariri's assassination, and has turned it into one of the best-guarded facilities in the world; a contingent of 450 Lebanese soldiers, policemen, and UN security guards forms a nearly impregnable barrier around the hotel. Real-estate prices in the neighborhood have soared, a source close to the UN investigation later told me, as the ambient effect of so much security has radiated outward, creating a small calm space within the chaos and crime of greater Beirut.

Since the summer of 2005, the Monteverde has been at the center of one of the world's most sensitive criminal investigations. Inside, a team of about 200 people from nearly two dozen nations—forensics experts, DNA specialists, telecommunications





analysts—has been sifting through evidence relating to the assassination of Hariri, one of the Middle East's best-known and most influential politicians. Hariri had supported a campaign to end Syria's 29-year occupation of Lebanon, a campaign that had culminated, in September 2004, with the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1559, calling for the withdrawal of Syrian troops and the disarmament of Hezbollah, the Syrian-backed Shia guerrilla group in Lebanon. A suicide truck bomber destroyed Hariri's heavily guarded six-car armored convoy as it passed the St. George Hotel along the Beirut seafront just before 1 p.m. on February 14, 2005. The United Nations commission was created several weeks later, prompted by concerns that the Lebanese security and criminal-justice systems, riddled with Syrian agents, would be unable to effectively investigate the killing.

In the nearly four years since, the UN team has carried on its work in fear. Unsolved car bombings and other attacks have killed or maimed two dozen prominent Lebanese opponents of Syria. The first team leader, German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis, stepped down from his post and fled Beirut in January 2006; after implicating senior Syrian officials in Hariri's murder, he had been informed by Western intelligence officers of two assassination plots against him. This past January, Wissam Eid, a high-ranking intelligence official in the Lebanese Internal Security Forces, was killed by a car bomb east of Beirut. He'd been working closely with the UN commission. "Things got very tense after that," a UN insider who had left the investigation earlier this year told me, when we met at a café in downtown Beirut. "Morale dropped away. People got scared."

Today the UN investigators live and work in 50 drably furnished rooms spread out over the five floors of the Monteverde. They work in total secrecy—no communication with the press, little association with outsiders. "They are as careful with us privately as they are with journalists," I was told by Jeffrey Feltman, the former U.S. ambassador to Lebanon and now the principal deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs. "We don't know what they've uncovered." Drawn blinds cut off the spectacular views of the Beirut skyline; a weight room and a large swimming pool provide the only diversions. When team members venture outside to interview witnesses, they use decoy armored convoys and switch vehicles frequently.

As I stepped out of the car and walked to the edge of the gorge, scribbling in my notebook and taking in the views of downtown Beirut and the azure Mediterranean beyond, a pair of Lebanese soldiers from the nearby checkpoint approached. One asked for my passport, leafed through it, handed it back to me, and told me to turn back. "This is a high-security zone," he said. "Nobody is permitted to stop."

THE BOMB THAT killed Rafiq al-Hariri weighed 2,200 pounds and left a crater 30 feet wide in the Corniche, Beirut's seaside promenade. In addition to Hariri, it killed 21 people, and injured 220 more. It set dozens of cars on fire and knocked down several buildings; all the windows of the nearby, 446-room InterContinental Phoenicia Hotel

were blown out, and the hotel—a symbol of Beirut's postwar rebirth—was forced to close for months.

Eight months later, a report to the UN about Hariri's assassination outlined a conspiracy of remarkable breadth and complexity. It revealed that three months before Hariri's death, his security detail had been mysteriously reduced from 40 to eight; that six anonymously purchased mobile phones were used on the day of the attack to keep the bomber informed of Hariri's movements and to provide intelligence on the three possible routes that Hariri could take from the parliament building to his home; that the suicide truck moved into position one minute and 49 seconds before Hariri's convoy passed by; and that the truck itself had been stolen on October 12, 2004, in Sagamiyama City, Japan. The killers appeared to be sophisticated, politically connected, and well-funded: clearly this was not the work of a lone extremist or a fringe group. It bore the hallmarks of a government-sponsored assassination.

For Lebanon, the reverberations of the attack were deep and long-lasting. The violent death of a charismatic consensus builder, who was nurturing stability and attracting foreign investment, seemed to blow the country back to the 1980s, when Mafia-style assassinations and car bombings were as brazen as they were commonplace. It inflamed long-standing local tensions—Sunni versus Shia, pro-Syrian versus anti-Syrian—and roiled the politics of the Middle East. "Rafiq Hariri was the most important

political figure in Lebanon, but he was also much bigger than Lebanon," Feltman told me. "He had powerful connections, an incredible political mind, and limitless financial resources. Whoever murdered him wanted to create a hole in Lebanese politics that still hasn't been filled."

A second bomb, perhaps bigger than the first, has yet to detonate. It involves the naming and prosecution of the people behind the plot—steps that, by most accounts, now appear imminent. The United Nations Special Tribunal for Lebanon, created in May 2007 by the Security Council, is expected to convene as early as January 2009, in a residential suburb of The Hague. Late last year, a UN panel appointed 11 judges, including four Lebanese who, reportedly, were spirited out of the country and placed, with their families, in protective custody. In November 2007, the secretary-general appointed a new investigative commissioner—the third so far—who will also continue on as the tribunal's lead prosecutor. Several commission insiders told me that he is close to wrapping up the investigation and will call for the tribunal to be seated within weeks.

The ramifications of the Hariri case will extend well beyond justice and jail sentences. Many observers believe that the commission has been building a case against the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, and his inner circle. Depending on how high up the charges go, the tribunal could have a major impact on the geostrategic map of the Middle East. An indictment of members of the Assad family and their closest allies, all members of Syria's minority Alawite sect, could scuttle negotiations for a comprehensive peace deal between Syria and Israel. It could drive Assad further into the arms of Iran. It could even lead to a palace coup, or stir the country's

MORE ONLINE

For a slideshow of besieged Lebanese politicians by Kate Brooks, visit www.theatlantic.com/lebanon.

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Saad al-Hariri, Rafiq's son and political heir, sits in his mansion. He rarely leaves it, for fear of assassination.

disenfranchised Sunni majority to revolt. "Imagine if the Syrian regime is proved to have planned and executed this assassination," one Western diplomat with long experience in the region told me. "What will the Sunni majority in Syria think about a leadership that took out one of the major Sunni leaders of the Middle East?"

Indeed, so much is at stake that rumors are now circulating about what the investigation will be allowed to conclude. In recent months, members of the UN commission in Beirut have speculated among themselves about a deal being secretly brokered between Western leaders and Assad that would allow the Syrian leader to hand over a few token officials in exchange for immunity from prosecution. The United States, which joined France in the drive to establish the tribunal, seems to be cooling toward the investigation. "The Americans have Iraq syndrome, so when you talk to American diplomats about Syria being involved up to the top, the reaction is hedging: 'Syria could become another Iraq,'" one UN commission staff member told me. Paul Salem, the director of the Carnegie Middle East Center, a Beirut-based think tank, went further: "Israel and the United States are not eager to see this regime collapse," he told me from Qatar in mid-September. "They are afraid of the consequences."

ONE AFTERNOON LAST July, I walked uphill through the Hamra neighborhood of West Beirut, passing through several checkpoints manned by private security guards. I stopped before a 10-story Italianate sandstone mansion set high above the Mediterranean—Rafiq al-Hariri's former residence, now the headquarters of his son and political

heir, Saad. Ushered inside, I walked down marble-floored hallways, past black-marble columns, gilded wall sconces, and life-size hagiographic photos of the murdered billionaire. Hariri's media director, Hani Hammoud, took me on a tour of the building. We stepped into Hariri's small private library, frozen exactly as it had been on the day he was killed, except for the framed memorial photos on every chair and a single red rose in a vase on Hariri's desk ("His widow brings a new one every day," Hammoud said). We walked into a cavernous reception hall, decorated in typically extravagant Arab style, with crystal chandeliers and dozens of gilt-trimmed wing-back chairs and sofas. "Mr. Hariri was a big man, and he liked to live large," Hammoud told me.

Hariri was born in 1944, in the port city of Sidon, the son of a poor orange farmer, and he moved to the Saudi Arabian city of Jiddah in the 1960s, working initially as an accountant and math teacher. He got to know members of the House of Saud and eventually amassed a fortune building hotels and apartment complexes for the royal family. When the Lebanese civil war ended, in 1990, Hariri returned home a billionaire and financed the reconstruction of much of downtown Beirut—then largely rubble—and began a massive development program.

Elected prime minister in 1992, Hariri pursued accommodation with Syria's then-President Hafez al-Assad—Bashar's father—who, under the so-called Pax Syriana, maintained tens of thousands of troops in postwar Lebanon. The occupation enriched Syrian generals and other insiders who controlled real-estate and import-export businesses, and enabled Syrian intelligence agents to watch for Sunni extremism brewing inside Palestinian refugee camps. It also allowed Syria to

pursue a proxy war against Israel along Lebanon's southern border, through Hezbollah—a source of leverage against the Jewish state as Syria presses for the eventual return of the Golan Heights. Hariri conceded control of Lebanon's security to Assad, allowing a heavy troop presence and the penetration of Syrian intelligence agents into every sector of Lebanese life; in turn, Assad gave Hariri wide rein over the country's economic development and postwar reconstruction.

With the death of Assad, at age 69, in June 2000, and the ascension to the presidency of his son, Bashar, a British-educated ophthalmology student, accommodation became more difficult. When Bashar al-Assad came to power, he was initially hailed as a young reformer, eager to reach out to the West, but America's invasion of Iraq—and the accompanying rumblings about the democratic transformation of the Middle East—heightened his regime's sense of vulnerability. Assad railed against the invasion, cracked down on domestic opposition to his rule, and strengthened economic and military ties to Iran.

As tensions between Syria and the U.S. increased, Hariri—along with Walid Jumblatt, the Lebanese Druze chieftain and one of Lebanon's most powerful figures—allied himself with France and the United States, gambling successfully that the West would turn sharply against the Syrian regime and enable Lebanon to make a break. The Security Council resolution demanding Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon was an enormous blow to Assad. In Damascus, members of Assad's inner circle began to worry not only about Hariri's new course for Lebanon but about his reach inside Syria itself. "These guys saw Hariri as an immensely rich and powerful Sunni, and it exacerbated the paranoia of the minority regime," says Nicholas Blanford, a Beirut-based British journalist and the author of *Killing Mr. Lebanon*, a book about Hariri's murder.

IN JUNE, IN his airless office at the Berlin Supreme Court, I met Detlev Mehlis, the first head of the UN Security Council's International Independent Investigation Commission, who'd fled Beirut in early 2006. A veteran terror prosecutor, he had previously spent a decade investigating the 1983 bombing of the French Consulate in West Berlin—the trail ultimately had led to Carlos the Jackal. The investigation Mehlis had supervised in Beirut was one of the most ambitious criminal inquiries in history: UN investigators from 17 countries fanned out across the Middle East and Europe, took 244 witness statements, seized 453 pieces of evidence, and gathered 16,711 pages of documents. Bashar al-Assad, who according to Mehlis "stonewalled" the commission for five months, was eventually forced to capitulate to a Security Council resolution, passed in October 2005, that subjected the Syrian regime to sanctions if it didn't produce key witnesses.

When Mehlis launched his probe, Assad's Syria was a full-fledged pariah state, accused by the Bush administration of backing Hezbollah and arming the Sunni-led insurgency in

Iraq. (Despite the regime's inherent hostility toward Sunni extremists, Assad perceived a shared interest with them in inflicting pain on the United States.) At that time, the United States, France, and Saudi Arabia viewed the investigation commission and tribunal as a means to press for the downfall of Assad, whose regime the leaders of all three countries regarded as a force for radicalization.

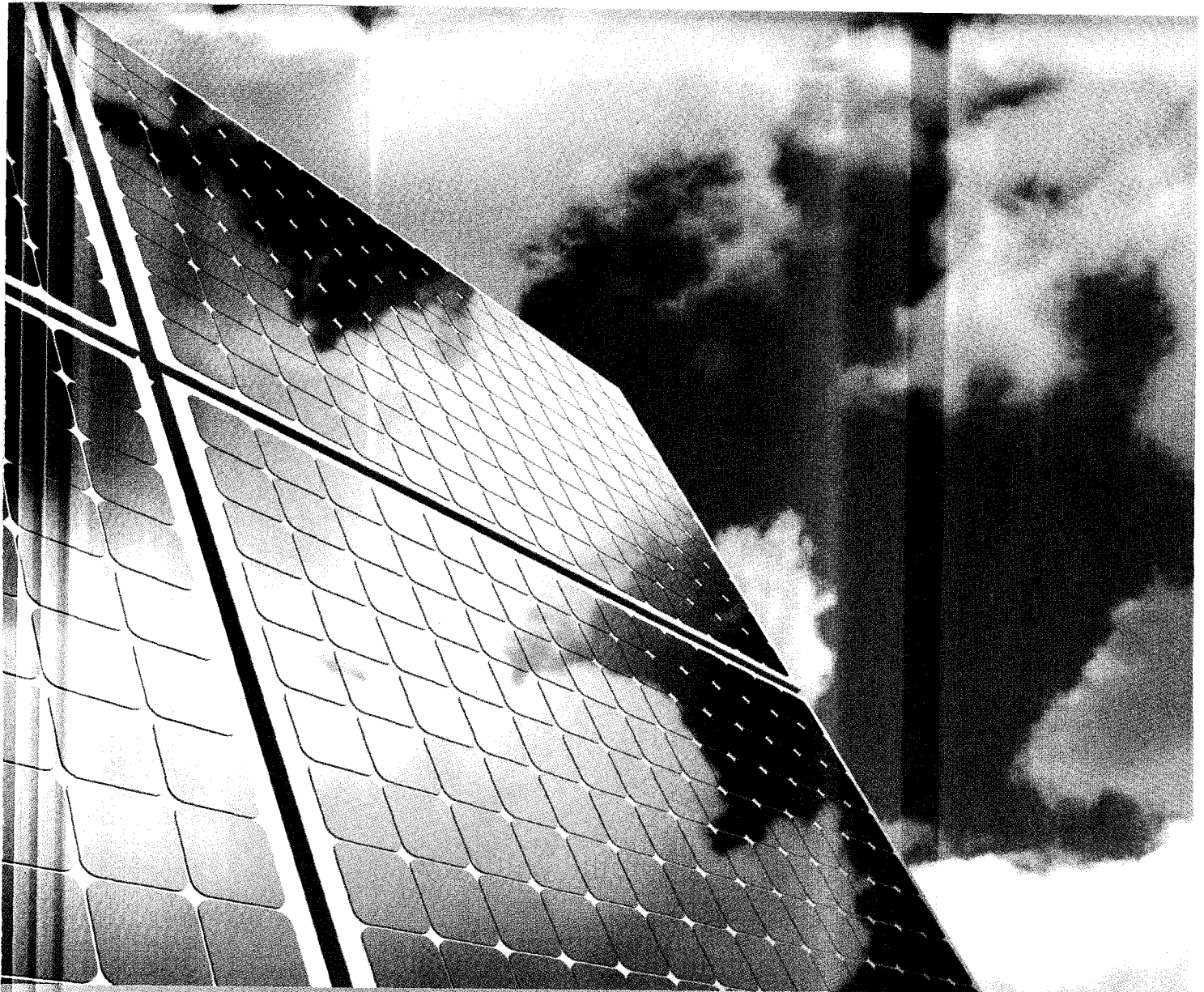
Several leaders who backed the tribunal's formation had personal ties to Hariri: the French president, Jacques Chirac, had been a close friend since his time as mayor of Paris, and had been one of the few Western leaders to attend Hariri's funeral, in Beirut. Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah also was close to Hariri, a fellow Sunni. "That assassination remains a major sticking point between Saudi Arabia and Syria," says Salem, the head of the Carnegie center in Beirut. "It has stirred up personal animosity, and Abdullah still holds Assad responsible for it."

The Mehlis report to the United Nations, a preliminary assessment submitted in October 2005, deeply implicated the Assad regime. It chronicled the rising antipathy between Hariri and high-ranking Syrian officials, including Assad himself, as Hariri followed an increasingly independent course for Lebanon. According to a Syrian source inside Lebanon, identified in the report as a former Syrian intelligence agent, antipathy coalesced into a murder plan two weeks

after the adoption of the Security Council resolution that demanded Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. The agent claimed that "senior Lebanese and Syrian officials" met at the Meridien Hotel in Damascus, at the presidential palace, and at the office and home of a senior Syrian intelligence official to plot the crime. In January 2005, a high-ranking officer had told the source that "an earthquake" would soon "rewrite the history of Lebanon"; the same witness said he had visited a Syrian military base repeatedly in the days before the killing, and had observed a white Mitsubishi Canter truck—the same type used as the bomb carrier—with a white tarpaulin over the flatbed. He told investigators that he had driven a Syrian officer on a reconnaissance mission to the St. George Hotel area in Beirut on the day before the bombing, and he implicated four Lebanese generals in providing the killers with "money, telephones, cars, walkie-talkies, pagers, weapons, ID cards," in collaboration with General Rustam Ghazali, the head of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon. (The four Lebanese generals were later arrested by Lebanese security forces and remain in prison.)

The report quoted another witness, who said General Mustafa Hamdan, one of the Lebanese officials later arrested, had implied a few months before the assassination that Hariri's days were numbered: "We are going to send him on a trip; bye-bye, Hariri." And a third witness, a low-ranking Syrian intelligence agent named Zuhir Ibn Mohamed Said Saddik, described the assassination as a plot hatched in Syria between July and December of 2004, and involving seven Syrian officials and four senior Lebanese officials. The driver of the explosives-laden truck, he said, was an Iraqi

In January 2005, a high-ranking officer had told the source that "an earthquake" would soon "rewrite the history of Lebanon."



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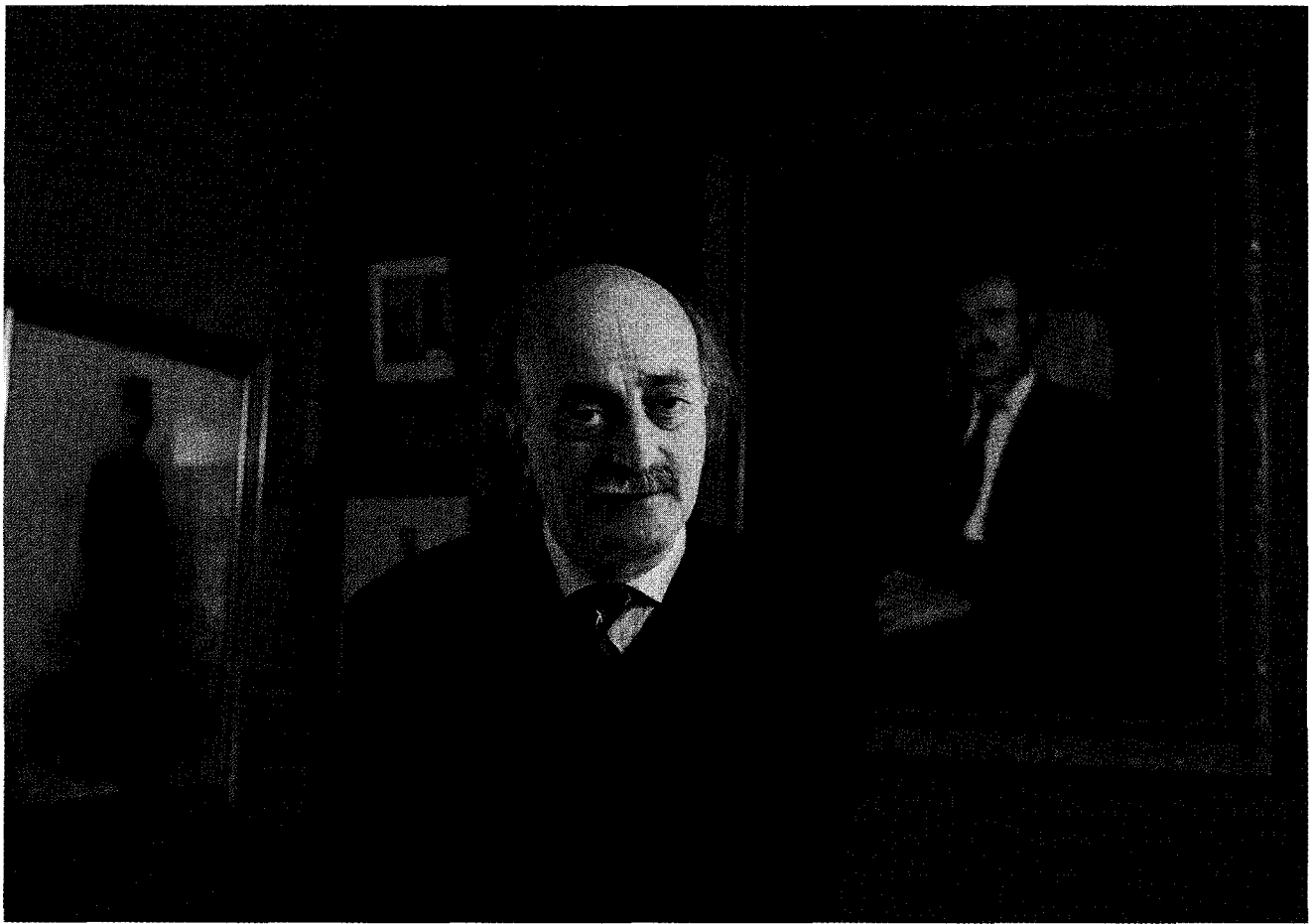
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The Druze leader, Walid Jumblatt, at his house in the Chouf Mountains

named Ahmad Abu Adass, who had been misled to believe that his target was Ayad Allawi, Iraq's prime minister at the time; special explosives had been ordered, to "direct suspicions towards extremist Islamic groups." Saddik, who was interviewed in September 2005, was later arrested for his alleged role in the crime; subsequently released, he vanished in March 2008 from a Paris suburb.

Though only preliminary, the report found "probable cause to believe that the decision to assassinate [Hariri] could not have been taken without the approval of top-ranked Syrian security officials." The highest-ranking officials implicated were Asef Shawkhat (Assad's brother-in-law and the head of Syria's military intelligence department) and Maher al-Assad (Assad's younger brother and the head of the presidential guard). Assad has continued to deny any Syrian role in Hariri's killing.

When Mehlis was forced to leave Lebanon, he believed the commission's work was at least "50 percent" finished, and that it could be wrapped up—under another commissioner—within a year. "The United Nations told me that for security reasons I could not stay in Beirut any longer," he told me. "There were specific threats, submitted to me by the UN, the French, the Americans, so they wouldn't accept responsibility if I would stay there. They offered to set up offices for me wherever I wanted to, but I felt you cannot handle an investigation by remote control." Mehlis had es-

tablished a motive; he had named suspects; he had compiled a vast amount of forensic evidence, from phone records to bomb residue. What was left, he told me, was analyzing the voluminous telephone traffic that had been intercepted by Lebanese security forces and identifying the half-dozen spotters who had tracked Hariri's motorcade.

M EHLIS'S SUCCESSOR WAS Serge Brammertz, then 43, an ambitious Belgian lawyer who had served as deputy prosecutor at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Brammertz won the job thanks in part to Mehlis's recommendation, but there was little love lost between the two UN commissioners. "The UN has a culture of destroying your predecessor and starting from scratch, and Brammertz succumbed to that," I was told by the UN insider who'd left the investigation earlier this year. He said Brammertz believed that Mehlis had been carried away by anti-Syrian sentiment: "Mehlis conveyed a sense that he had raced ahead under international pressure to implicate Syria, without checking the admissibility of the sources." One of Mehlis's principal sources, the low-ranking Syrian intelligence official Saddik, was "a bit of a nut case," he said. "He couldn't be trusted."

As Brammertz took control of the investigation, in 2006, Western attitudes toward Syria were shifting. Iraq's

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collapse into a bloody sectarian war made the prospect of regime change in Syria look less desirable. Western experts warned that if Assad fell, plausible scenarios would include the collapse of the state, armed conflict between Sunnis and Alawites, and the emergence of a Sunni radical fundamentalist movement along the lines of Hamas, or Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood—or al-Qaeda. Syria began to change its behavior as well. It signed a defense pact with Iran in June 2006; but that same summer, Israel's highly destructive war with Hezbollah created an opening in the Middle East peace process. Assad had been pushing for negotiations over the Golan Heights for years, only to be shunned by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his successor, Ehud Olmert. But in 2007, when Assad made overtures to Olmert about initiating peace talks, Olmert was receptive. Indirect discussions about swapping the Golan in return for recognition of Israel and curbs on Hezbollah have continued intermittently since then.

Brammertz established a style different from his outspoken predecessor's. Where Mehlis had been open with the media, Brammertz cut off all contact. He released opaque, highly technical reports that described some of those implicated by Mehlis only as "persons of interest." This sober approach backfired politically: as the investigation dragged on, with little apparent progress and almost no revelations, Hariri's supporters in Lebanon accused the UN of trying to whitewash the final report. "Brammertz was so absent from the public eye that he projected the sense that nothing was happening," the Western diplomat told me.

Mehlis himself has fanned those suspicions. When I suggested that, at least based on the published UN reports, Brammertz's two years of investigation (he stepped down in January 2008) did not add much to Mehlis's own report, he responded, "From the reports—and that's all I know—I would say you are right. I have no idea what they have been doing."

The UN insider acknowledges that Brammertz "didn't move as quickly as he should have," but insists that some progress was made. In part, Brammertz's more methodical approach was dictated by the creation of the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which began gaining momentum shortly after he arrived in Beirut. Previously, it had been expected that the case would ultimately be prosecuted in a Lebanese court, using the results of the UN investigation as evidence. But after a string of killings of prominent anti-Syrian critics, the Lebanese cabinet asked the Security Council to create a UN tribunal. "There was this feeling that because of these killings, you could not safely carry out such a trial in Lebanon," the Western diplomat explained to me. "Judges would be blown up, witnesses would be blown up." As it became clearer that the Hariri case would be tried in an international court, with its very high evidentiary standards, it made sense "to be more discreet," he said.

Brammertz reopened the crime-scene probe, discovered one of the suicide bomber's teeth—Mehlis's team had been

unable to recover any of the bomber's remains—and carried out definitive DNA testing. He also made headway, the UN insider told me, in tracing the cell-phone traffic and in naming the spotters who had tracked the route of Hariri's convoy. And he investigated and debunked alternative theories of the crime—for instance, that Hariri had been killed by al-Qaeda. Brammertz left in January 2008, to become chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. "Brammertz was tired; he realized it was time to go," the UN insider told me. When I asked whether Brammertz's conclusions had differed significantly from Mehlis's, he replied, "Mehlis's approach was sensationalist, but what Brammertz found more deeply confirmed Mehlis's conclusions."

Daniel Bellemare, the third and, presumably, final investigative commissioner, began work in Beirut under heavy guard in January 2008. Bellemare, a Quebecois in his mid-50s, has spent much of his career prosecuting federal drug cases in Montreal, and has also served as Canada's assistant deputy attorney general. "He is low-key and efficient. He doesn't make mistakes, and he doesn't draw attention to himself,"

says Robert Doyle, his former chief of staff in Ottawa. Bellemare's official mandate is to conclude the investigation and carry through as chief prosecutor before the tribunal.

The pace of the investigation has picked up again since Bellemare arrived, I was told by one U.S. diplomat who has met with him several times at the Monteverde Hotel. "His requests to us for [investigative] manpower, for human resources, are quite detailed. He says, 'I need more people and I want to get them faster.'" Nonetheless, after setting up shop at the Monteverde and shutting himself off from the press, Bellemare found himself subjected to the same criticisms that had dogged Brammertz. By then, the wave of car bombings that had terrorized Lebanon's anti-Syrian politicians and journalists had died down. Syria's peace talks with Israel

were moving apace. On July 12, 2008, in the most important sign to date of Assad's rehabilitation, French President Nicolas Sarkozy welcomed the Syrian leader to Paris at a gathering of more than 40 leaders from Mediterranean states. (Chirac, tellingly, refused to attend the summit.) "Assad is trying to present himself as a peacemaker now," I was told by one Syrian exile who maintains close contacts in the Assad regime. "He believes that if he takes care of the politics, the tribunal will be finished."

Is Bellemare pressing for convictions of top Syrian officials? Some believe that the matter is out of his hands: last March, King Abdullah II of Jordan was reported to be pushing for a deal with Assad—"the most astounding plea bargain of all time," U.S. Senator Arlen Specter called it—that would grant the Syrian president immunity from prosecution in exchange for a pledge to rein in Hezbollah and Hamas. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice rejected talk of any deal, saying that immunity for Assad would damage the "integrity" of the investigation. Nonetheless, the UN insider told me that among the staff, the possibility that the

"I think that after our time in Beirut, some politicians realized what continuing the investigation meant. It could lead to regime change in Syria. [Indeed,] it would have to."

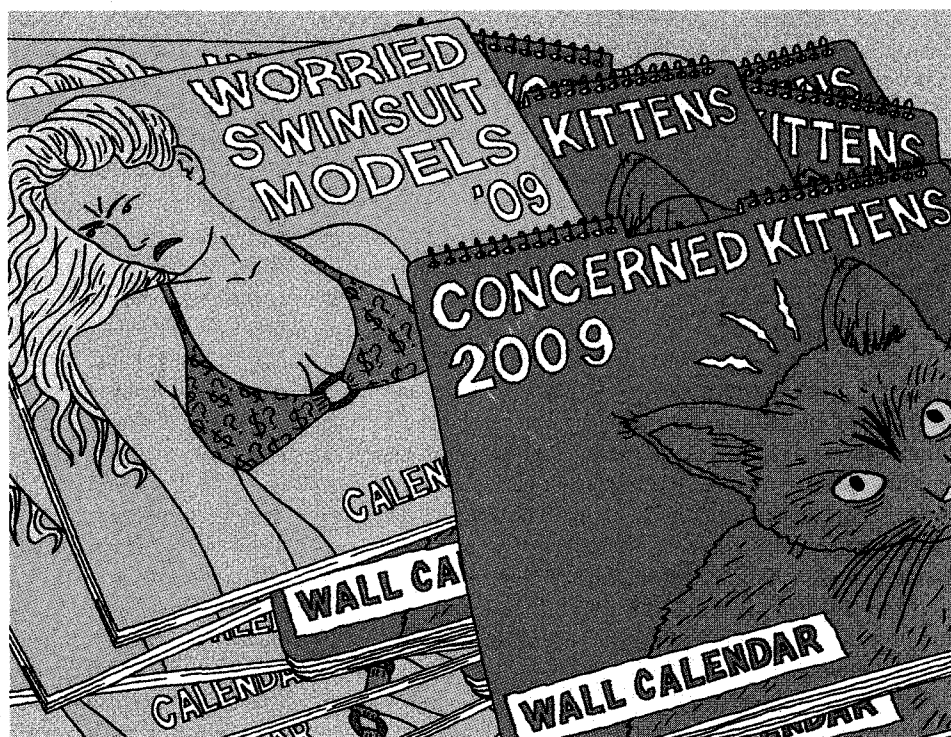
tribunal could be sabotaged by key figures within the UN Security Council, or at the highest levels of Western governments, has become a constant topic of conversation. Assad's diplomatic overtures, he said, have led some UN staff members to believe "that the investigation will be sold down the river, or it will lead to a minor official being indicted." That view is also put forth by the Syrian exile with ties to the regime, who expects that the tribunal will be allowed to wither away. He went on to tell me: "It will have financial problems, it will have trouble bringing people to the court. You will hear, 'This one vanished, this one was killed, this one is a liar.' At the end, the tribunal will achieve nothing."

Assad's diplomatic overtures to the West could discourage witnesses from coming forward, says a former UN commission member: "If Bashar is doing well, the feeling is 'I better invest in my future, not go against him.'" And the sheer difficulties of subpoenaing witnesses and extraditing key figures in the Syrian regime could compel the court to work out some kind of compromise. "Obviously, if it's some Syrian colonel who's implicated, that makes things easy," says a Beirut-based analyst. "Sure, a colonel would never do something without approval of the highest Syrian officials, but you need a trail of evidence. The Syrian regime feels confident that if the big players do not want to make the link, and if the physical evidence stops somewhere, they will have deniability." One figure who was deeply involved in the investigation professes no doubts about where the truth lies—but he does doubt that the tribunal is willing to venture down that road. "Everyone you are talking to will tell you that this murder would not have been possible without the consent of Assad," he told me. "I think that after our time in Beirut, some politicians realized what continuing the investigation meant. It could lead to regime change in Syria." Indeed, he added, "it would have to."

Others I spoke to in Beirut and Washington say they have confidence in Bellemare and the judicial process—and that it's too late to talk about deals. No formal mechanisms exist for slowing down or derailing the UN commission or the tribunal. And Bellemare, who has full independent authority as investigator and prosecutor, is known for his integrity; he seems unlikely to impede the investigation or trial at the behest of powerful players in Washington or Paris. "The train has left the station," the Western diplomat told me: "The tribunal can't be stopped."

"I think that at the end of the day, justice will be served," said Saad al-Hariri, the murdered man's son and a leader

GALLERY NOW ON SALE! *by Peter Arkle*



of the March 14 movement, the anti-Syrian opposition that coalesced after Hariri's murder and helped force Assad to pull all 14,000 troops out of Lebanon. Hariri told me that the three-year investigation into his father's murder isn't lengthy by UN standards; several comparable UN investigations have dragged on for a decade or more. "I have spoken many times to the French, to President Sarkozy when he came to Lebanon. He said there would be absolutely no playing with the tribunal, that this was something that had to happen. I have full confidence in the UN process."

Given current U.S. strategic imperatives—keeping the region from becoming even more unstable, containing a powerful Iran, tamping down tensions over Israel and Palestine—the tribunal could hardly be coming together at a more awkward time. But just as the push to remake the Middle East damaged America's standing and its interests, a policy that too rigidly maintains the status quo might be equally harmful. Pressing for the prosecution of only a token Syrian official or two, well down the chain of command, would have practical drawbacks, even leaving aside its moral implications. Lebanon's pro-Western, anti-Hezbollah constituency would regard anything less than indictments of Assad and key members of his regime as a whitewash; that could plunge the country back into another round of sectarian violence, and send a message that the Middle East's pattern of impunity remains unchanged.

Perhaps the least bad outcome, all things considered, would be a negotiated settlement, in which Assad would turn over two or three members of his inner circle—high-profile leaders whose indictment would damage the regime politically—but receive immunity for himself and his brother.

In return, he would need to pledge to keep Hezbollah on a tight leash, to chart a more moderate course at home and abroad, and to make comprehensive peace with Israel. Even this outcome would carry a bad stench, and be dismissed by many as a cynical ploy. But all things considered, it might do the least harm.

ONE JULY AFTERNOON, I drove into the Chouf Mountains, southeast of Beirut, to meet Walid Jumblatt—the Druze chieftain, a leader of the March 14 movement, and one of Rafiq al-Hariri's closest confidantes—at his 300-year-old family palace, outside the village of Mukhtara. Now that Hariri is gone, Jumblatt is Lebanon's most prominent and powerful anti-Syrian leader. Jumblatt had been interviewed by Mehlis in June 2005, and recounted for the commissioner a chilling conversation he'd had with Hariri after a meeting between Hariri and Bashar al-Assad in the fall of 2004. According to Jumblatt, Hariri said he'd been warned by Assad not to block an extension of the term of Lebanon's pro-Syrian President Émile Lahoud, a bitter opponent of Hariri's who had consistently blocked Hariri's attempts to redevelop downtown Beirut. "Lahoud is me. I want to renew his mandate," Assad had told him. "If Chirac wants me out of Lebanon, I will break Lebanon." Jumblatt recalled that Hariri had been "tense and disappointed. He was in a very bad position."

After parking the car, I walked through two security checkpoints manned by Druze fighters with AK-47s, and climbed up a path to Jumblatt's Tuscan-style villa, past landscaped gardens, courtyards, and stone-walled canals filled with clear, rushing water. Jumblatt was pacing about his spacious,

memento-filled office, with French windows offering views of the Eastern Lebanon mountain range—and Syria beyond. He was still shaken in the aftermath of a military assault on Druze villages this past May by hundreds of Syrian-backed Hezbollah fighters; the Shia guerrillas had poured in from the Bekaa Valley and battled Jumblatt's Druze militia for four days. "We lost 24 fighters," Jumblatt told me.

The military offensive by disciplined Hezbollah forces in the mountains and against Saad al-Hariri's ragtag street-fighters in Beirut had ended a nearly yearlong political stalemate between pro-Syrian and anti-Syrian forces in the Lebanese government—a stalemate provoked largely by the creation of the UN tribunal. (Pro-Syrian politicians had boycotted the parliament and prevented the Lebanese government from authorizing the tribunal; the UN was forced to invoke its Chapter VII mandate, which obligated all signatory countries to accept the tribunal or face sanctions.) In the aftermath of Hezbollah's military success, a new compromise president was named, a Christian general named Michel Suleiman—and Hezbollah won veto power in the parliament. In a stunning display of realpolitik, both the U.S. and France welcomed the break in the deadlock. Jumblatt saw it as another ominous sign that Syria and Assad were being welcomed back into the world community.

"I do believe the U.S. is using the tribunal as a bargaining chip with the Syrian regime," Jumblatt told me as he gazed out the window toward Syria. Jumblatt had been one of the last people to see Hariri alive; "he believed he was going to be killed," the chieftain said. Leaning back in a leather chair, hands folded in his lap, Jumblatt looked at once pensive and resigned. The democratic, pro-Western Lebanon he had campaigned for had proved to be a chimera; and the campaign to avenge his closest colleague seemed to be collapsing as well. He said he expected the tribunal to end with some sort of a deal along the lines of that in the Lockerbie case: the regime of the Libyan dictator, Muammar Qaddafi, was accused of blowing up Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in December 1988, killing 270 people. After intense negotiations with Western powers, Qaddafi finally handed over two low-level intelligence agents to face charges in a Scottish court set up in the Netherlands at Camp Zeist, just a few miles from the court in which Hariri's murder case will be tried. The same kind of arrangement "would be a face-saving solution for Assad," Jumblatt told me.

Jumblatt led the way into the courtyard, where a Harley Davidson motorcycle was parked in the shade of a eucalyptus tree; he often takes spins through the Chouf Mountains, setting aside for a time the responsibility of leading a small religious minority in still-factionalized Lebanon, as well as directing the main anti-Hezbollah, anti-Syrian political movement in the country. "You cannot talk to dictators," Jumblatt told me as he put on his leather motorcycle jacket and mounted the bike. "You cannot appease dictators, like Sarkozy is doing. You can only kill them—like they have been killing us ... But nobody at this moment is willing to make the Syrian regime fall down." **A**

INFLECTION

They are white planets in a galaxy, these wheels
of cheese—before the fungi knobble the skin, cobble
some resistance in the rind. Deep in the cool
caves of Auvergne, a nun sets the circles on shelves
so their surfaces will stain, sheen, stipple,
shade ... while above her, a Latin chant
folds many women in one voice. If glass
were music, could it sound like this?
How can we call those words
human, when they've flown so far
from our commerce, our marketplace?
Every mold that steeps the skin is local: grafted
and endangered as the dead letters become notes
floating still in vowels from the nuns' grille.

—Christina Pugh

Christina Pugh's most recent collection of poems is Restoration. She teaches at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Joshua Hammer is a writer based in Berlin. He is working on a book about a colonial-era rebellion and reprisal in southwest Africa.

Does the free market corrode moral character?

To the contrary.

I can attest from personal experience that, if you try to talk about the free market on today's university campuses, you will be buried in an avalanche of criticism of globalization. The opposition of faculty and students to the expansion of international markets stems largely from a sense of altruism. It proceeds from their concern about social and moral issues. Simply put, they believe that globalization lacks a human face. I take an opposite view. Globalization, I would argue, leads not only to the creation and spread of wealth but to ethical outcomes and to better moral character among its participants.



Many critics believe that globalization sets back social and ethical agendas, such as the reduction of child labor and poverty in poor countries and the promotion of gender equality and environmental protection everywhere...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Jagdish Bhagwati is University Professor of economics and law at Columbia University, senior fellow for international economics at the Council on Foreign Relations, and the author of *In Defense of Globalization*. He writes widely on public policy and international trade.

Certainly. Or does it?

It is clear that the ferocious competition of interests and passions, the mad rule of money, and materialism as the measure of all things — in short, the free market, released from all rules and governed only by the greed

of the most powerful — fatally corrodes our souls. This is what the great Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn thought at the end of his life.

This view was shared by the family of French thinkers of the 1930s called the “non-conformists,” which included Charles



Péguy and a few others. They saw commodity exchange as a source of deper-

sonalization. It was also the thesis of an entire group of Christian (or simply spiritualist) thinkers who saw in the idea of the “free market” the death of moral values and the end of man's faith and aspiration to the absolute...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Bernard-Henri Lévy, the French philosopher, has written more than thirty books, including the New York Times bestseller *American Vertigo* (2006) and, most recently, *Left in Dark Times: A Stand Against the New Barbarism* (2008), both published by Random House.

It all depends.

The answer depends completely on what kind of market we are talking about and what we mean by “moral character.” Today's supposedly “free market” could be described more accurately as a “fettered” market. Our financial and corporate regimes fall well



short of the classic assumptions of perfect structure, perfect competition, and perfect information.

In the first edition of *Economics: An Introductory Analysis*, a textbook that I read during my

sophomore year at Princeton in 1948, the Nobel laureate Paul Samuelson aptly summed up the issue: “the problem with perfect competition is what George Bernard Shaw once said of Christianity: ‘the only trouble with it is that it's never been tried’” ...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

John C. Bogle is founder and former CEO of Vanguard and president of the Bogle Financial Markets Research Center. His many books include *The Little Book of Common Sense Investing* and *Enough: True Measures of Money, Business, and Life*, which will be published this fall.

Not at all.

There is little consensus on what is moral, let alone on what corrodes morality. A man of faith measures moral character by one's ability to abide by the demands of his God. A socialist



might measure moral strength by one's dedication to the redistribution of wealth. A liberal — by which I mean a classical, Adam Smith or Milton Friedman liberal, not a liberal in its American meaning of “pro-big government” — might be religious, and he might see the merits of income equality, but he will always put freedom first. This is the moral framework to which I subscribe.

According to this school of thought, freedom of the individual is the highest aim, and the ultimate test of a person's character is his ability to pursue his own chosen goals in life without infringing upon the freedom of others to pursue their own goals...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Born in Somalia, Ayaan Hirsi Ali emigrated in 1992 to the Netherlands, where she served as a member of parliament from 2003 to 2006. She is the author of the bestseller *Infidel* and a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Of course it does.

Competition in the market puts people under great pressure to break the ordinary rules of decent conduct and then to produce good reasons for doing so. It is these rationaliza-



tions — the endless self-decep-

tion necessary to meet the bottom line and still feel okay about it — that corrode moral character. But this isn't in itself an argument against the free market. Think about the ways that democratic politics also corrodes moral character. Competition for political power puts people under great pressure — to shout lies at public meetings, to make promises they can't keep, to take money from shady characters, to compromise principles that shouldn't be compromised. All this has to be defended somehow, and moral character doesn't survive the defense — at least, it doesn't survive intact. But these obvious flaws don't constitute an argument against democracy.

To be sure, economic and political competition also produce cooperative projects of many different sorts — partnerships, companies, parties, unions...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Michael Walzer is professor emeritus in the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. He is a contributing editor of the *New Republic*, co-editor of *Dissent*, and the author, most recently, of *Thinking Politically*.

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IN THE 1950S, DISNEYLAND thrilled visitors with its imaginative House of the Future. Now Disney has opened a new House, with a new vision of future domesticity. Our correspondent looks in—and finds that what’s to come will be tough on the stomach, relentlessly beige, and, in every sense, subprime.

FUTURE SCHLOCK

By P. J. O'Rourke

MORE THAN HALF a century ago, Disneyland opened its House of the Future attraction. I was 10, and I was attracted. In fact, I was in love.

The Tomorrowland dwelling had a cruciform floor plan, a more elegant solution to bringing light and air into a “machine for living” than Le Corbusier had been able to devise. Each side of each arm of the cross was glazed, sill to ceiling. The mullions and rails between the panes were as pleasingly orchestrated as Mondrian’s black stripes.

All the proportions were pleasing. They seemed to adhere to what the ancient Greeks called the “divine proportion,” roughly eight to five. It is the ratio that governs the shape of the galaxies, the Fibonacci sequence, the spiral of the nautilus shell, and the Parthenon’s configuration, and it generated a little piece of Disneyland circa 1957.

Of course, at 10, my critique of the House of the Future was, “It’s neat.” But, within the limits of childish understanding,

I would have tried to explain. I was an architecture fan like my friends were sports fans, and a big Frank Lloyd Wright Prairie School booster. And I couldn’t help but boo the diluted, piddle-colored brick version of the International Style that filled the construction sites of my childhood. The only way you could tell a shopping center from a grade school from a minimum-security prison was by the amount of flood-lighting and fence wire involved.

Disney’s House of the Future had the clean simplicity prized in the 1950s as relief from decades of frayed patchwork, jury-rigging, and make-do clutter caused by Depression and war. But the spare white form had been warmed with curves. Each quadrant was a streamlined seamed pod, a crossbreed: half jet fuselage, half legume. And, as with an airplane or a beanstalk, the structure rose aloft, flying on a plinth above its house lot.

The House of the Future was sponsored by the Monsanto Company and designed by Marvin Goody and Richard Hamilton from the MIT architecture department. They were

ROSS MACDONALD



prescient in various unimportant ways: the residence contained cordless phones; a flat-screen, wall-sized TV; and a somewhat sinister-sounding device called a “microwave oven.”

The most futuristic aspect of the House of the Future was that it was made almost entirely of plastic. At the time, plastic still enjoyed the benefit of its definition (2a) in *Merriam-Webster's*: “capable of being molded and shaped”—into anything you wanted! Plastic was the stuff that didn’t rust or rot or break when you dropped it. Thanks to plastic and a little glue, the clumsiest kid (me) could build splendidly detailed models of Mars passenger rockets and atomic-powered automobiles and many other things that would never be realized. We were a decade away from *The Graduate* scene that made the word an epithet. I, for one, think Dustin Hoffman should have taken the onscreen career advice he was given, sparing us such later gems as *Ishtar*, *Rain Man*, and *Outbreak*.

Instead, in 1967, it was Disney’s House of the Future that came to an abrupt end. Or not-so-abrupt. Reports have it that a wrecking ball merely bounced on the sturdy polymer seed cases, and the prematurely postmodernist structure had to be sawed apart by hand. (As many a timorous would-be suicide has discovered—with viselike grip on bridge railing—the future is harder to get rid of than you’d think.)

Tomorrowland survived being homeless. But it lost its zest. Walt had died in 1966, and Disney Inc. was deprived of his instinct for America’s flights of fancy.

Nothing speaks of living in the present like getting a complete makeover, which Tomorrowland endured in 1998. Disney, displaying one of the greatest absences of irony on record, gave Tomorrowland a “retro” theme.

Disney’s press release called the new Tomorrowland “a classic future environment.” This explains the Astro Orbitor ride, built in a style that might be called “Jules Vernacular,” with lots of exposed rivet heads and rockets with nose cones shaped like the Eiffel Tower. “Classic future” also excuses the Chevron-sponsored Autopia, a holdover from the Tomorrowland of yore, where tourists can drive on a “superhighway”—with divided lanes!—in small fiberglass imitations of the dream cars at auto shows when Ike was in office.

MY FAMILY AND I arrived at Disneyland on a hot June day. We had spent the preceding two hours stuck in traffic on an un-super Interstate 5, idling away \$4.35 gasoline in a rental car that was no one’s idea of a dream. Autopia did not appeal.

But one part of moldy old Tomorrowland wasn’t past its sell-by date. A freshly minted house of the future had had its ribbon-cutting—with laser scissors?—earlier that month. These digs were completely original and all brand (specifically: Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, and Life|ware) new. Also new is the name, “The Innoventions Dream Home,” but typing that even once has proved traumatic, so I will henceforth refer to it simply as HoF II.

My wife took our younger children, Poppet and Buster, “to infinity and beyond” (Buzz Lightyear being integral to the classic future’s canon). And I led my 10-year-old daughter, Muffin, to utopia’s latest abode.

Muffin asked where we were going. I told her and she said, “So it’s really, really, really modern?” It was more modern than that. HoF II has a subprime mortgage, or so it appears. The joint was closed up.

“Technical difficulties,” said a Disney “cast member.”

I invoked what media privileges I have and called Disney public relations. John McClintock, a senior publicist, could not have been more polite and understanding. He did what he could to get my daughter and me a walk-through and a look-around. That was all you got with the old House of the Future anyway, although HoF II comes with performers portraying a future family (which still has one mom and one dad, amazingly enough).

McClintock called back. “Technical difficulties,” he said, plus a firm no-go from his higher-ups.

Muffin and I could do no more than look over a railing into the ceiling-free household one floor below us. It has a single-story open plan with a circular shape, though the circularity seems to have more to do with the preexisting shape of the building and with crowd control than with futurism. Not that there were any crowds trying to get in. As far as I could tell, nobody but Muffin and me noticed that HoF II wasn’t open.

I hoisted Muffin so she could get a better view. “It looks like our hotel,” she said. Not even. And where we were staying is best described as “Schlitz-Carlton.”

According to Disney, the shape of things to come can be found at Pottery Barn, with a quick stop in Restoration Hardware for “classic future” touches and a trip to Target to get throw rugs and cheap Japanese paper lanterns. HoF II was designed by the Taylor Morrison company, a home builder specializing in anodyne subdevelopmental housing in the Southwest. The company’s president and CEO told the Associated Press, “The 1950s home didn’t look like anything, anywhere. It was space-age and kind of cold. We didn’t want the home to intimidate the visitors.”

A few HoF II innovations were discernible from our perch. The art on the walls, set in fussy gilt frames, kept changing—from Manet to Monet and back, I think. And HoF II’s dining-room table had plasma-screen place mats showing water rippling over rocks—just the sort of thing a drinking man wants waving away under his eggs in the morning.

Much of what we couldn’t see had been described in an AP piece, “Disney Revives ‘House of the Future’ to Showcase Technology.” Various passages had caught my attention when I’d read it, and raised my blood pressure: “Closets will help pick out the right dress for a party.” Imagine that: a talking mirror telling you, “That makes your butt look big.”

“Countertops will be able to identify groceries set on them and make menu suggestions.” At our house, that would mean the strip of Formica between the sink and the stove piping up in a computer-generated snivel, “I hate broccoli. Meatloaf *again*?” Probably the fridge would chime in, “Well, if you don’t like meatloaf, make your own damn dinner.” And this is assuming that the kitchen doesn’t have IT problems that cause the countertop to go, “Macaroniandcheesemacaroniandcheesemacaroniandcheese ...” Buster already does that.

I’d shown the AP article to my wife. She said, “You don’t sell a house like this, you divorce it.”

I asked Muffin what she thought of HoF II.

"It's beige," she said. Beige it is—upholstered, carpeted, and painted in brownish, grayish, yellowish hues. And beige metaphorically, too. Any random dull normal person (we have one in our family) could come up with snappier ideas for the future than HoF II seems to contain. How about self-washing windows? Automobiles have had them since the 1930s. And have you watched the clever manner in which convertible car tops operate? What keeps that technology from being applied to self-making beds? If a house *must* be smart (and, as a man who is continually outwitted by his wife, children, and dogs, I'd really prefer that it just dummy up and mind its own beeswax), why can't it be as smart as a Pontiac Solstice?

I didn't even see one of those robot vacuum cleaners that trundles around Hoovering on its own agenda, never mind, say, a helium balloon with a propeller and a mop of feathers that flies about dusting things (it might not do a very good job dusting, but at our house neither do we).

My wife later suggested a "face bidet" for chocolate-smearing kiddies and an iPod "nag chip" that periodically interrupts the music to tell children to do their homework. Muffin wanted to install hot-air driers in our shower floor "to save the Earth's towels." Poppet, our 8-year-old, envisioned a system of pneumatic tubes that would deliver the stuffed animal of her choosing to the place of her choice, worldwide.

Buster, who's 4, said, "Dogs on the potty." A serious challenge to the plumbing industry, not to mention the dogs, but it's a worthy goal.

Even if Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, and Life|ware had had no ideas whatsoever, you'd think they could have tapped Disney's proven reserves of whimsy. Where's Mrs. Potts, her son, Chip, the officious candlestick, and the chairs that walk around in *Beauty and the Beast*? Where is the *plastic* inventiveness of Mickey and Donald cartoons?

DENIGRATION OF THE future has become an intellectual prop over the past 40 years. Looking forward went out of fashion about the time that Buckminster Fuller's audacious geodesic domes, meant to cover entire cities, wound up as hippie-height, wobbling, tent-sized structures on Mendocino County pot communes.

Bruce Handy, writing in *Time* about Disney's reopening of a deliberately out-of-date Tomorrowland in 1998, began his essay with the sentence, "The future isn't what it used to be." He went on, "It's not a novel observation to point out that our culture has become increasingly backward looking."

Well, given the future envisioned in Disney's House of the Future, who can blame us for looking the other way?

Disney's Tomorrowland is deeply, thoroughly, almost furiously unimaginative. This isn't the fault of the "Disney

culture"; it is the fault of *our culture*. We seem to have entered a deeply unimaginative era.

Let us not confuse imagination with innovation or even with progress. Man's descent from the trees and adoption of the brilliant mechanics of bipedalism were innovation and progress of the first order. But what did we do with this progress for our first million years as humans? As best we can tell, we hung around the Olduvai Gorge and beat some rocks together to make "chopping tools."

On the other hand, the Italian Renaissance was so imaginative that during its three centuries, practically everything worth imagining was imagined. And yet not much was actually *invented* in Florence, Pisa, or Rome.

Global imagination, like global climate, seems to have cycles—natural, man-made, or whatever. Sometimes what people imagine for the future is bogged down in the literal—call it "blogged" for short. The last thousand years of the Roman Empire, for example, were no great shakes. The Romans had all the engineering necessary to start an industrial revolution. But they preferred to have toga parties and let slaves do all the work.

The Chinese had gunpowder but failed to arm their troops with guns. They possessed the compass but didn't go much of anywhere.

They invented paper, printing, and a written form of their language, but hardly anyone in China was taught to read.

And here we are in 2008. Name an avant-garde painter. Nope, dead. Nope, dead. Yep, Julian Schnabel is what I came up with too. But it's been a quarter of a century since he was pasting busted plates on canvas. He's making movies now. And movies are famously not any good anymore. Name a great living composer. Say "Andrew Lloyd Webber" and I'll force you to sit through *Cats* and *Starlight Express* back-to-back. Theater is revivals and revivals of revivals and stuff like musicals made out of old Kellogg's Rice Krispies commercials, with Nathan Lane as "Snap." More modern poetry is written than read. Modern architecture leaks and the builders left their plumb bobs at home. The most prominent contemporary art form is one that is completely unimaginative (or is supposed to be): the memoir.

To top it all off, we have just experienced perhaps the greatest technological advance in the history of humans. And what are we using the Internet for? To sell one another 8-track tapes on eBay and tell complete strangers on Facebook the location of all our tattoos. And, apparently, to tell ourselves what to do with the groceries we just bought.

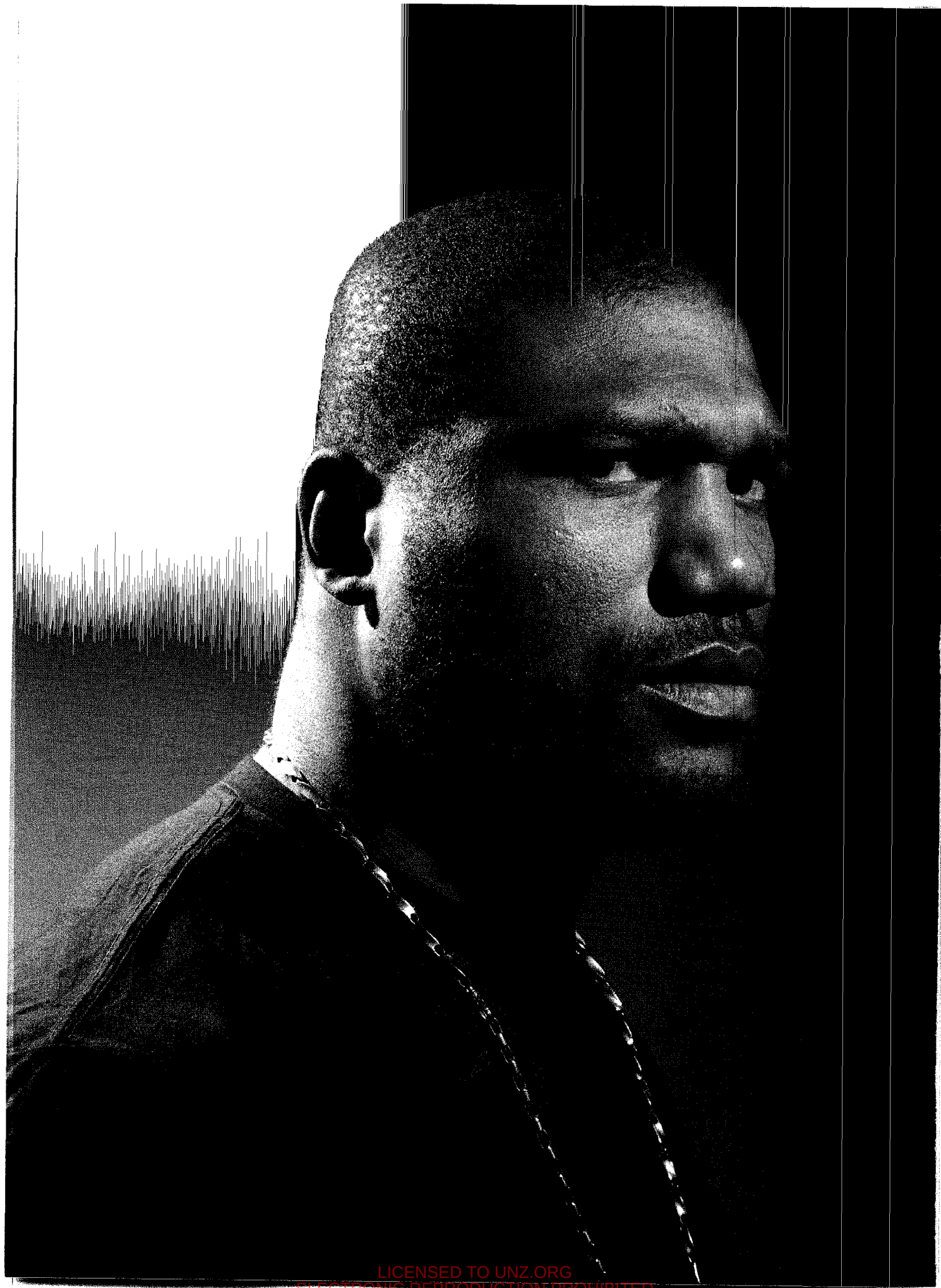
I took a last look into the homestead of the hereafter and said to Muffin, "Let's get out of here."

She was nothing loath. I asked her, "What do you think will happen in the future?"

"You'll buy me a humongous ice-cream cone." ■

P. J. O'Rourke is an Atlantic correspondent. His most recent book is On the Wealth of Nations (2007).

Global imagination, like global climate, seems to have cycles—natural, man-made, or whatever. Sometimes what people imagine for the future is bogged down in the literal—call it "blogged" for short.



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QUINTON JACKSON WEARS a steel bicycle chain around his neck, has a tattoo of a black panther on his enormous bicep, and has a tendency to howl like a wolf. He is also born-again, the loving father of four children—and known for delivering the hardest blow in the history of professional sports. Now, in attempting to defend his Ultimate Fighting Championship title, he is also trying to hold onto his sanity. An intimate portrait of a mixed martial artist—and of the growing American fixation with the warriors who earn their living beating each other bloody

PROFILE

RAMPAGE

By David Samuels

I'M THE BEST fighter in the world.
I'm the ugliest fighter in the world.
Can't nobody hurt me.

Stripped to the waist inside a tiny sweatbox gym inside an A-frame house on an industrial street near Big Bear Lake, California, a mixed-martial-arts fighter named Quinton "Rampage" Jackson is quick-stepping around a heavy bag, making it jump with thudding four- and five-punch combinations while chanting his mantra.

Juanito Ibarra, the fighter's trainer, looks pleased. "I brought up his jab two inches for this fight," he says. Jackson, the defending light-heavyweight champion of the UFC—Ultimate Fighting Championship—will take on Forrest Griffin over the July 4 weekend at the Mandalay Bay Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. Ibarra expects that Griffin will try to use his longer reach to keep Jackson from scoring a quick knockout, and that his efforts will be unsuccessful. "They have to have a plan to beat Rampage. They have to follow it to a T," Ibarra says. "Their margin for error is tiny."

With two minutes left in his workout, Rampage mounts a final assault on the heavy bag. An invisible string seems to connect the fighter and the trainer who controls his daily rhythms. Both men are born-again Christians with an overpowering hunger for love, and each uses that weakness to manipulate the other throughout the six weeks of training camp. They speak in their own shorthand about a prospective hire at one of their gyms. "He don't say much. A Christian man, knows the Bible, don't eat pork," Rampage says, punishing the heavy bag with a series of brutal uppercuts.

Rampage Jackson has knocked out jiu-jitsu black belts, Greco-Roman wrestlers, Thai kickboxers, and judo champions using an arsenal of punches, body slams, and choke holds sanctioned by the UFC, which is the leading promoter of a mongrel sport that is wildly popular among younger fight fans and martial-arts disciples who revel in the adrenaline-fueled combination of athleticism and bloodshed. Jackson, who has the biceps of an ironworker, the torso of a linebacker, and the quick, delicate feet of a ballet dancer, is known as

MORE ONLINE

For an interview with David Samuels visit www.theatlantic.com/rampage.

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much for his theatrical appearance and behavior as for his considerable talents as a fighter. He wears a steel bicycle chain around his neck and large diamond studs in his earlobes, has a black panther tattooed on his left bicep, and howls like a wolf before he fights. His big muscles, his ghetto tattoos, and his reputation as a bit of a weirdo all contribute to his intimidating presence inside the UFC-regulation cage, an octagon surrounded by a six-foot-high chain-link fence with padded stanchions in the corners. Since being born again in 2004, Jackson has toned down some of his more devilish antics, and amended the STREET SOLDIER tattoo on his right arm so that it reads RAMPAGE GOD'S STREET SOLDIER. He drives a jacked-up \$200,000 custom monster truck with his face on it out to clubs in Los Angeles where he is invariably seen with attractive women (his four children have three different mothers), and otherwise comports himself in a way befitting his riches and fame and outsized personality.

His time on the heavy bag is up, and Jackson enters the cage to practice his jiu jitsu against a young fighter named Paulo Gazze, who is built like a baby bull. "Close the triangle, or he'll pull your leg up!" warns Junior, the man who trains Rampage in Brazilian jiu jitsu. Gazze, one of perhaps two dozen martial-arts *ronin* who spar daily with the champ, mounts Rampage's back and goes for a Kimura, or reverse shoulder lock, known to traditional judo students as *ude-garami*. Encoded in the simple anatomical logic of this move is the exquisite balance of physics and pain that rules the sport. The fighter slides his opponent's wrist up along his back to his ear, forcing him to submit, or "tap out." The Kimura was named after Masahiko Kimura, perhaps the greatest judo practitioner of the past 100 years, who used the move against Hélio Gracie, the first national sports hero of Brazil. Gracie trained the elite of his country—including generals, a dictator, newspaper and magazine publishers, and movie stars—in his streamlined version of the Japanese martial art, which is commonly known in mixed-martial-arts circles as Gracie jiu jitsu. When Gracie refused to submit, Kimura broke his arm, and the *ude-garami* became known in Gracie circles as the Kimura. In 1978, one of Hélio Gracie's seven sons, Rorion Gracie, left Brazil for Southern California, where he became an extra on Hollywood movie sets while teaching Gracie jiu jitsu out of the garage of his suburban home, in Hermosa Beach. In 1992, Rorion Gracie conceived of the Ultimate Fighting Championship, a no-holds-barred tournament that would demonstrate the superiority of his family's fighting style over all others.

In 2001, the UFC was bought for \$2 million in cash by Lorenzo and Frank Fertitta, the billionaire owners of the Station Casino chain, in partnership with a cardio-boxing trainer named Dana White. Helped along by the Fertitta brothers' deep pockets and by White's fanboy enthusiasm for mayhem, the UFC now regularly fills 12,000-seat arenas across America and has approximately 250 fighters under contract, the wealthiest of whom can make upwards of \$1 million per fight.

With the torso of a linebacker and the feet of a ballet dancer, Rampage is master of the exquisite balance of physics and pain that rules the sport.

A recent article in *Forbes* suggested that the UFC's corporate worth was more than \$1 billion.

Climbing out of the cage, Jackson reaches down and pats the head of his dog, Andronicus, a fearsome-looking shepherd mix who meekly licks the fighter's fingers. "He loves too much," Rampage says. Then he throws back his head and howls, a weird sound that he has been making since he was 12 years old.

"It's his birthday today, so I'm letting him screw off," Ibarra explains. Beneath a jaunty porkpie hat with the emblem of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, his face is a study in the melancholy fatalism unique to boxing trainers and older men who love beautiful younger women. His basset-hound features descend into drooping jowls and a natty goatee. His grandfather worked on the docks for 50 years, and he says his uncle became a vice president of the ILWU when it was run by the communist labor organizer Harry Bridges. "That's how I got money to train fighters, and get burned by fighters," Ibarra explains.

After a particularly humiliating loss in Japan during which the newly born-again Jackson was publicly berated by his corner men before being taken to the hospital with broken ribs, Ibarra called the fighter and offered to train him. "I kept hearing through the gyms that Rampage went crazy because he found Jesus Christ," Ibarra remembers. The trainer shared his own experience of being born again, which followed the soul-crushing ordeal of losing the fighter Oscar de la Hoya, who went on to become boxing's richest fighter under the tutelage of another trainer. What Rampage lacked was exactly what Ibarra had to teach—technique, control, and an older man's knowledge of the fight game. Ibarra's plan involved building up Jackson's skills to the point where he could win and keep a championship while creating a network of profit-participation deals that would make both men rich. "He has his own rims out now and his own energy drink, his own toy, and we've got some other things in the works," Ibarra explains. "No one uses his name without paying big bucks."

HIS WORKOUT DONE, Rampage puts on a fresh shirt and heads back to the log-cabin condo where Ibarra's son is cooking an all-protein lunch with lots of garlic and no sugar. On the counter by the stove are large plastic jugs of powdered supplements—vanilla-flavored Max Pro, Nutritox, and Get Hard—along with a number of individual bananas on which someone has written RAMPAGE in black Magic Marker. His daily schedule, which is affixed to the refrigerator with a magnet, begins at 5:30 a.m., when he wakes up and consumes a protein bar and a bottle of water. At 6 a.m. Rampage goes for a run and then has another bottle of water. At 7 a.m. he eats a breakfast of three eggs and oatmeal. At 9:30 a.m. he gets a protein shake, followed by wrestling and jiu jitsu, which is followed by steak and vegetables and a single piece of fruit.

After Rampage finishes his lunch he shows me his black Audi two-seater and invites me for a ride to the car wash. He



Rampage Jackson takes a knee to the gut from Forrest Griffin during their UFC championship bout in Las Vegas.

has a long face and his eyes are set high up on his skull, giving him a mournful, dignified appearance. "I like defense," he explains, when I ask him to describe his style as a fighter. "I noticed when I started wrestling that I was a defensive wrestler and that people make mistakes."

His parents split when he was young. The most powerful presence in his childhood on the streets of Memphis was a neighborhood drug dealer who first noticed Jackson when he was 8. "He said, 'Police isn't gonna be noticing you. They won't think an 8-year-old has drugs. So hold these drugs and hold these guns. If the police come, watch the drug dealers run, you just play with your ball,'" he remembers hearing from his mentor, whom he describes as a master con artist. "I'd sit on the street and put my crack in a Skittles bag. I knew the law. If the crack was found 15 or more feet away from you, they couldn't put it on you. So I'd throw the Skittles bag 15 feet away over my shoulder in the grass. It looked like trash in a bad neighborhood. It looked like trash with more trash." The last he heard, his mentor in the crack game was fresh out of jail and living with his mother.

The main criticism of Jackson as a fighter has always been that he lacks the ability to fight out of the clinch, a knock that comes from two fights he lost to his nemesis, a Brazilian fighter named Wanderlei "The Axe Murderer" Silva, in 2003 and 2004. Both fights ended when Silva kned Jackson in the head and knocked him out, a move that is legal under UFC rules. The first time, Rampage says, he was tired from

having defeated Chuck "The Iceman" Liddell that afternoon, and he made the mistake of ducking down under a high kick instead of blocking it. "I stayed down there like a dummy," he remembers. "He knee-kicked me in the face." The memory of ducking under the kick still gives him nightmares, he says. In the second fight, Silva dazed Jackson with a hard right hand, stood him up, kned him in the head, and knocked him out again. Rampage nods when I ask him whether he knows that Silva is training Forrest Griffin for their title fight at Mandalay Bay.

Jackson is glad to tell the story of how he was born again. During a two-week partying binge that followed a victory over the Brazilian fighter Ricardo Arona, whom he knocked unconscious with his trademark body-slam, which has been judged to be the hardest blow in all of professional sports by *National Geographic's Sports Science* television program, Jackson woke up one night in the middle of a terrifying dream. The devil had his hands on his chest and was preparing to remove his soul. "He had some female spirits around him and he was saying 'It's okay,'" Jackson says, his eyes widening at the memory. "Then I heard this strong voice say, 'Do you know this man?' And I was like, 'No.' He said, 'It's not okay.' And I woke up and grabbed my chest and made a noise that I'd never made before in my life."

The fighter woke up gasping for air, and spent the next few weeks feeling increasingly frightened and alienated. Some time later, Jackson suffered another moment of

chest-gripping terror that was triggered by a radio ad for a Universal Studios theme-park attraction after he had dropped his son D'Angelo off at preschool. "The first thing it said was 'The curse of' something—I can't remember," Jackson recalls. "And it says, 'Your soul is mine.'" The voice weirdly echoed Jackson's dream, and left the fighter feeling even more freaked out. "Later on, when I turned the radio back on, when I got used to being a Christian," he remembers, "I said, 'Oh, that's a damn commercial for the Revenge of the Mummy ride.'"

Rampage's wife is Japanese, and is known in Jackson's camp as Mama-san. The children in her care range from pale-white D'Angelo, the oldest, who is an albino, to coal-black Raja, to Rampage's two younger children, who are half-Japanese. The entire family is waiting for us when we return to training camp. D'Angelo, who has brought home a report card filled with A's, gets a big hug from his father. "You can get anything you want," Rampage says proudly, before turning to Raja. "You're very smart. But you need to achieve," he tells his son, who has only recently joined his siblings in Mama-san's care. Raja looks hurt but doesn't back down. He stands close to his father, his hands at his sides.

The children have come equipped with presents for their father's 30th birthday. "Oooh, *Kung Fu Panda*!" Rampage says, unwrapping a gift. Mama-san hands him a card that says I LOVE YOU WITH ALL MY HEART, signed by his children. The fighter's eyes mist over. "Ah, this ... Y'all make me very happy. If there weren't so many people here, I would cry," he says. Instead, he roars like a lion at his daughter, Na-Na, who laughs merrily.

When I leave, Rampage smiles at me, and then slaps me in the face with his open right hand. In the time I've spent with Jackson, I've seen him hit several casual acquaintances in the same way. He hits me exactly as hard as someone slapping aftershave on their cheeks in the Old Spice television commercials. It tingles for a moment and then the sensation is gone. Rampage claps his hand on my shoulder and shows me his teeth, then laughs. The message is that his body is a finely tuned instrument over which he has exquisite control. With the same amount of effort, he reminds me, he could have knocked me cold.

FORREST GRIFFIN AMBLES into the workout room in the basement of Mandalay Bay on the Wednesday before the fight, almost unnoticed by the reporters, which is all the more difficult considering that he is 6 feet 3 inches tall. With his pale Irish skin, stick-out ears, and lantern jaw covered in reddish-brown stubble, wearing a green waffle-pattern long-underwear shirt and a pair of Sprawl athletic shorts, he looks like an elongated version of the actor Matt Damon preparing for a role in a remake of *Deliverance*. A former cop from Athens, Georgia, Griffin has a political-science degree from the University of Georgia and a deadpan sense of humor. In 2005, he assured his place in UFC history by winning a blood-soaked bout against Stephan Bonnar on the first season of

The Ultimate Fighter, the UFC's reality show on the Spike television network. The fight was so spectacularly bloody that the show's audience doubled, then doubled again, until nearly 10 million people were watching.

Standing on the mat in the center of the room, Griffin rolls his head and swivels his hips, works on some lateral movements, and then throws a few combinations. He picks up a rope and sends it cutting through the air with a flick of his powerful wrists, then trips and hangs his head. "I swear I'm really good at jumping rope," he says. He whirs the cord from side to side, and starts jumping again.

"Sixty seconds," his boxing trainer calls out.

"Ten seconds."

"Time."

Griffin is a famous workout junkie, and he continues to sweat even after the reporters lose interest. Finished with the jump rope, he laces on his UFC-regulation gloves—padded gauntlets that soften the blow from a fighter's knuckles while leaving the rest of the hand exposed.

"One-two, step right to him," his trainer chants, catching the fighter's punches. "Give me six of those. Right on his chin now. Do it quick. Hard right hand." Even in this setting, Griffin is unable to disguise the simmering fury that drives him.

Afterward, I leave the workout room with Griffin, and we find an empty room, where the fighter lies down on the floor to rest his back while Rampage Jackson entertains the reporters next door. I ask him whether he remembers getting hit as a kid.

"I remember getting hit a lot as a kid," he answers. "When I got hit by my stepdad, it was usually because I deserved it."

"What did he hit you with?" I ask.

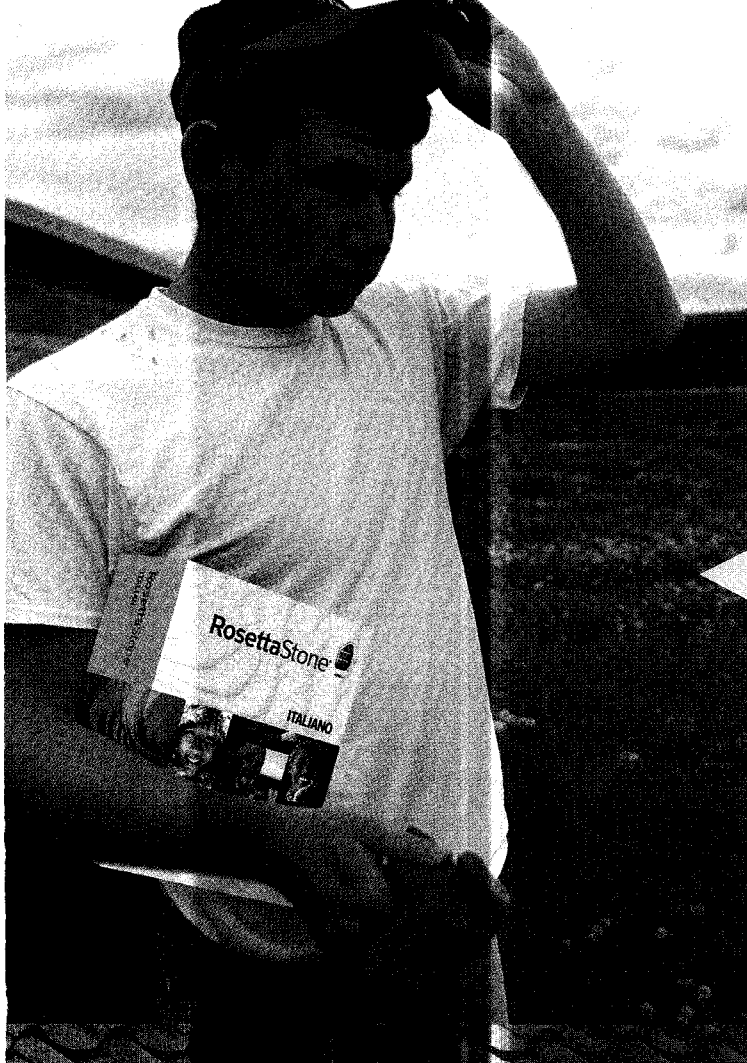
"Just his hand, or his belt, maybe," Griffin answers. "It was just on the backside, nothing crazy. You know, the same way I would discipline my kids."

Training himself to avoid getting hit took a while. The first fight he won was in the third grade, against a much bigger kid who hit him hard a few times until Griffin retaliated. "I head-butted him, kind of in the face, and fell on top of him," he remembers. "And his nose started bleeding, and he curled up, and then I just kind of hit him a little bit more." His stepfather liked to hunt deer, and took Griffin along when he was 12 years old. "I went hunting with him because I loved guns," he remembers, "and then he fucking killed Bambi and that was the last time I ever went hunting. Fuck, no. It's horrible. They kind of whine when you shoot them."

Griffin had a similar reaction a few years later when he first saw the UFC on pay-per-view. "Guys in T-shirts, crazy fat guys, guys that looked like pro wrestlers—people were just getting beaten," he recalls. "It was kind of gross." His feelings about the sport changed when the UFC instituted formal weight classes and got rid of the tight shorts that fighters used to wear.

Fighting is the essence of human competition, Griffin says. I ask him how often he loses track of himself in the heat of a battle.

Rampage slaps me in the face with his open right hand. With the same amount of effort, he reminds me, he could have knocked me cold.



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"Oh, usually when you lose kind of a sense of what you're doing, it's a good thing," he says happily. "You start doing what you always do, the things you know to do. 'Oh, I'm here to do this, I'm here to do this.' Move my hips and turn away. I can't turn away. I turn into him.'" In bad moments, he continues, time slows down to a crawl and you start thinking too hard about what to do next.

In a previous interview, Griffin had mentioned putting all the hype and magazine articles away in a box so that they don't clutter up his thinking. When I tell him that I liked the line, he cocks his head and looks at me.

"Oh yeah, that's true," he says. "It's a big Tupperware thing."

"There's an actual box?" I ask.

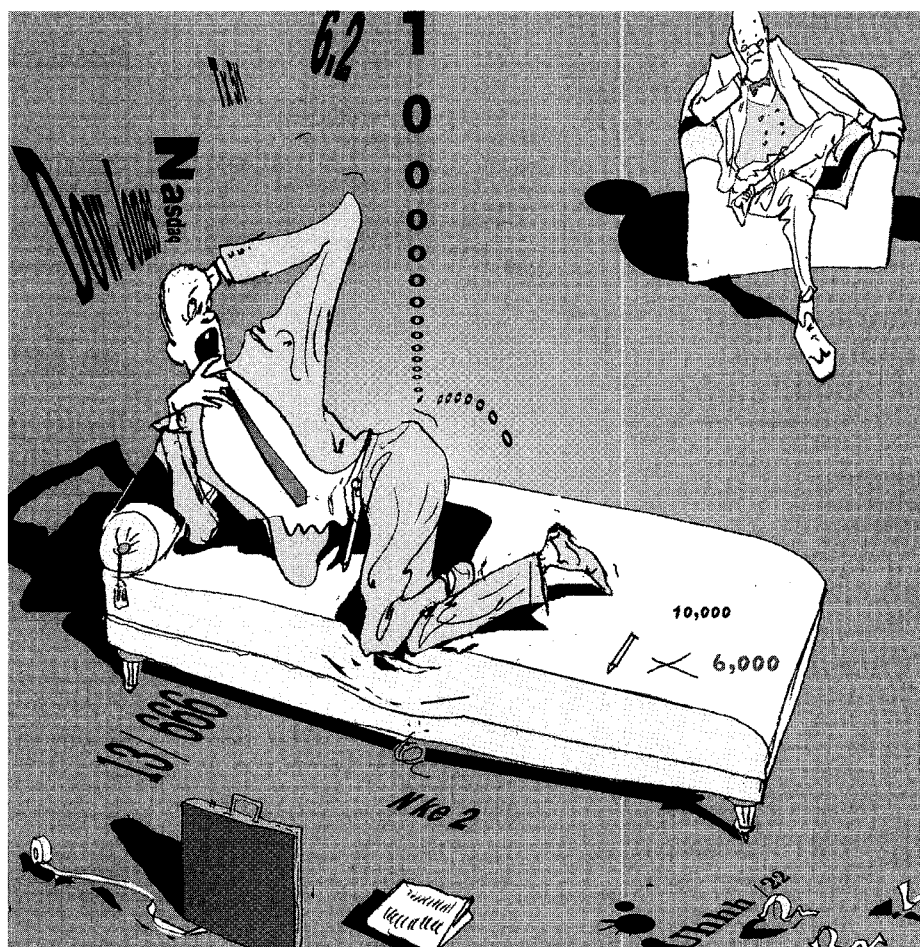
"Yeah," he answers. "I mean, it's both metaphorical and real. I don't want fucking fighting shit all over my house, to inundate myself with that. Put it in the box, and then you got it if you need it."

Singularity of purpose is Griffin's strength. When I ask him whether he ever worries about hurting his opponent in the ring, he shakes his head no.

"One, I'm selfish. I want for me," he answers evenly. "I'd cut you off in traffic, I don't care." He pauses and looks up at the ceiling, stretching out his injured back. "Two, self-preservation is an overwhelming instinct. It stifles and balances all others. Self-preservation destroys your humanity. It's you or them," he concludes. "In a fight, it's always gonna be them."

THE FIGHTERS ON the dais listen quietly as a handsomely besuited vice president of the MGM Mirage Corporation, which owns Mandalay Bay, opens the pre-fight press conference. "We couldn't be more excited about this Fourth of July weekend," the Mirage executive says. The UFC has brought 10 fights to the casino over the past three years, he adds. The estimated gate for Saturday's fight is \$3 million. His eyes low under a battered baseball cap festooned with faded glitter, Forrest Griffin looks even less comfortable than he did two days earlier, as Dana White, the UFC president, describes him as "the American dream." White then recounts the story of the Stephan Bonnar fight. "It sounded like a freight train was driving through the place," White says, cocking one eyebrow up. The combination of his shaved head, ripped jeans, black Pumas, and old CBGB T-shirt is a particularly obnoxious approximation of Ramones-style punk as handed down by the mall-culture vultures of Abercrombie & Fitch.

GALLERY DOPED TO DOW by Istvan Banyai



White tells me later that half his fighters make more than \$100,000 a year, which he regards as "damn good money." The fighters' cut equals less than 10 percent of the UFC's gate and pay-per-view revenues. Boxers traditionally might receive half. He rejects the implication that he talks too much and hogs the limelight at the expense of his fighters. "I'm the fucking promoter!" he objects. "I come on and say, 'Listen, we're gonna do this fucking fight, it's gonna be a great fight, this guy's fighting that guy!'"

White grew up in Ware, Massachusetts, and moved to Las Vegas with his mother when his parents divorced, before dropping out of college and moving back to Boston. At the age of 19, he quit his job as a bellboy at the Boston Harbor Hotel to open up a gym under a courthouse in Southie. After getting shaken down by a deputy of the gangster Whitey Bulger, who demanded a tribute of \$3,500 in cash, White fled back to Las Vegas, where he taught cardio-boxing to local businessmen who enjoyed the experience of getting hit in the face, and soon opened a few gyms. Among his clients were the Fertitta brothers—high-school friends from Vegas he had run into at a wedding.

One weekend, White and Frank Fertitta bumped into a UFC fighter named John Lewis, and decided that they wanted to learn "the ground game"—the sport's trademark

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combination of Gracie jiu jitsu, Greco-Roman wrestling, and hard elbows to the nose, eyes, and skull. "It was fucking literally like taking the blue pill in *The Matrix*," White remembers. "We became addicted to it and started training in it three or four days a week, trying to rip each other's limbs off." White also began managing some major UFC fighters. When he found out that the UFC was in trouble, he went to the Fertitta brothers, and together the three developed a new business model for the sport, in which the UFC would combine the traditional roles of promoter, manager, matchmaker, and sanctioning organizer.

"Basically, I'm in the contract business," White explains. "I can sign them up for a one-fight deal or a two-fight deal or I can sign them up for a three-fight deal. Or I can get a guy like Chuck Liddell that I want to lock up for as many fights as I can." White is also famous for rewarding showmanship by coming into the locker room after fights and handing out bundles of cash. "I don't wanna see somebody running around in fucking circles," he explains. "So to incentivize these guys, we give them bonuses—Fight of the Night, Knockout of the Night, Submission of the Night. We bonus 'em."

When I ask White about the UFC's habit of monopolizing revenues from pay-per-view broadcasts and from a heavily criticized new merchandising deal, he bristles.

"Let me ask you a question," he says. "How many fucking people are out there right now buying a Larry Holmes doll?" he says, referring to the dominant heavyweight boxing champion of the mid-1980s. He flexes his broad weight lifter's shoulders. "Now let me ask you another question: When's the last time Rowdy Roddy Piper wrestled?" he continues, referring to the former pro-wrestling star. "Twenty years ago, when I was a fucking kid! You can *still* go buy the Rowdy Roddy Piper fucking doll at the store. Rowdy's sitting on the couch watching fucking cartoons right now, getting paychecks in the mail."

"So the fighters get what percentage?" I ask.

"I don't know what the fuck off the top of my head the percentage is," he answers, "but I could tell you this: if we do a fucking quarter of what World Wrestling Entertainment does, they're gonna be very happy guys."

LATE AT NIGHT, I drive across the highway behind Mandalay Bay to the back lot of Vegas, where low-rise buildings house the contractors who build the elevators and the swimming pools. Inside a prefab warehouse on West Hacienda is a brand-new octagon. The desert air has been heated to more than 100 degrees. Rampage Jackson is lying down in the center of the octagon, where one of the several Brazilians in his camp works on his back. Juanito Ibarra comes over to me and explains what's going to happen next.

"He's going to go through the whole fight right now in the ring," he says. "He's going to raise his hands in victory. He's going to internalize the movements and visualize the fight. Then he's gonna lay down and see it all again in his mind."

The trainer looks more dour than usual, and winces when he climbs up the steps to the ring—the effect of two broken ribs that he suffered in camp.

"Son, do you know how talented you are?" he asks his fighter.

Ibarra's assistant, Zach, presses Play on Rampage's boom box, which blasts a rap song by Kane & Able. Rampage puts the hood of his black sweatshirt over his head, and then he steps out of his corner to take on his invisible opponent.

"Keep moving them big shoulders," Ibarra calls out. The fighter drops to his knees and begins pounding on the ground with his fists.

"Three more minutes!" Zach calls out.

"Stay with him!"

Rampage launches himself through the air and lands on top of Griffin, battering the crippled imaginary fighter. "Make

him face the cage," Junior calls out. "Hips down. Too high. Put his face to the other side. Now punish." Griffin escapes, and Jackson delivers a high, hard kick, followed by a whistling combination. The round ends with the challenger trapped against a stanchion, absorbing more punishment than any man could possibly bear.

"He's going to get desperate now," Ibarra warns. "He's going to go very wild on you. He's going to go back to all his bad habits."

When the fight is done, Rampage lies in the center of the octagon and relives the action round by round, beads of sweat rolling down his black legs. All around him, guys are stripping off their workout clothes and talking about girlfriends and finding cabs to take

them to nightclubs and hotels.

"I fought tougher guys under worse conditions," Rampage tells his kickboxing trainer, Chris Reilly. He pauses for a moment in front of a larger-than-life cutout of himself in a white fur coat and sunglasses. "His shoulder is bad."

"His shoulder is bad, his knee is bad," Reilly says.

"I can't go this long between fights," Rampage says, pulling a face at the thought that it's been 10 months since he last fought to defend his title.

"You did what your body told you to do," Reilly soothes him.

THE AFTERNOON WEIGH-IN on July 4 attracts perhaps 5,000 fans. The UFC's star announcer, the comedian Joe Rogan, hasn't shaved in days and is wearing a black stocking over his hair, which suggests that he has come to the weigh-in after pulling a stickup at the nearby In-N-Out Burger. Rogan, who is a former U.S. tae-kwon-do champion, started working as a UFC announcer in 1997, making him a holdover from the bad old days, when the stands were often populated by an unhappy scattering of drunks. He is familiar to viewers of more carefully sanitized mass entertainment from his roles as the fix-it guy on the NBC sitcom *NewsRadio* and the host of the NBC game show *Fear Factor*. He introduces the fighters. Rampage Jackson appears on a giant video screen to

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to breathe.
I want you
to breathe,"
the trainer says,
looking into the
face of his
injured fighter.
"Don't worry
about that leg."**

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announce, "I don't think Forrest can bust a grape," to which the challenger answers, "I'll take more pain than anyone." Juanito Ibarra appears onscreen and predicts that his fighter will win, adding, "I'll retire if Forrest Griffin beats Rampage Jackson."

The lights go out, the crowd rises to its feet, and immediately the area is illuminated by the LCD screens on sure-shot cameras, palm-size video recorders, and cell phones casting a glowing patchwork of blue squares and rectangles from floor to roof. Rampage is greeted by loud boos from the crowd of young men in their 20s and 30s, dressed in black T-shirts decorated with gothic tattoos that they are too shy to wear on their skin. Nearly all of them are white. Jackson puts back his head and howls. "All you Rampage-haters, get used to it," he shouts out into the roiling, blue-lit dark, rattling his chains. "I'm going to be your champion for a long time."

ON THE NIGHT of July 4, I go driving down the Strip with Ryan McKinnell, of the Web site mmamadness.com, and his friend Dave, who have decided to blaze a little weed and watch the fireworks burst over Treasure Island from the comfort of McKinnell's black Mustang. McKinnell, a husky guy in his mid-20s, is wearing a black White Sox cap and a Metallica T-shirt. He is upset over the way the crowd booed Rampage. "They're fucking warriors, man, each and every single one of them," he says. "They step in a cage, they get locked in it, and they have to look across and know that the person on the other end of that cage wants to hurt them."

McKinnell discovered mixed martial arts as a kid growing up in South Bend, Indiana, and he loves the sport with a pure passion that only male sports fans in their mid- to late 20s without another major object of affection in their lives can truly understand. Because today's fighters have grown up in the sport, he explains, it is easier for them to combine the striking blows and defensive tactics of different disciplines without getting caught in between stances.

In a world of millionaire athletes, the closefistedness of the UFC's owners may paradoxically increase the appeal of the sport—while the overt inequalities of the UFC pay scale provide fodder for outrage on mixed-martial-arts message boards on sites like *Sherdog* and *MMA Weekly*. "The second time Babalu fought Chuck Liddell for the title, for the fucking light-heavyweight title, Chuck Liddell made \$250,000 with bonuses," Ryan says, evangelical fervor lighting up his eyes as the fireworks pop out in pinwheels of red, white, blue, and gold in the curved reflective space above the dashboard. "Babalú, I believe, made \$16,000. And that made me want to rip my hair out."

Ryan rubs his eyes. Liddell is a special case, he says, being both the biggest draw in mixed-martial-arts history and Dana White's favorite fighter. "He was being set up to be the next great fucking poster child," he remembers of Liddell, who appeared on the cover of *ESPN: The Magazine* before being knocked out for the second time by Rampage Jackson.

I have a date with Liddell sometime after midnight. With time to kill, I hang out in the Jpop Sushi Bar & Lounge at

Mandalay Bay and listen to a Miami Beach refugee celebrate America's birthday on keyboards. Every 15 minutes, I dial a cell-phone number that someone gave me and leave another message on the Iceman's voice mail. It is well past midnight when I finally reach him.

"Sure, come on upstairs," Liddell answers, giving me his room number. I arrive at the room shortly after he does. Out of training for the past few months with a leg injury, he has developed a gut that balloons gently beneath his plain white T-shirt. Otherwise, he is a solid 39-year-old dude who dresses like an aging Huntington Beach punk, in blue jeans and a low-rise SoCal Mohawk. His fiancée is game enough to tolerate a reporter sitting on her couch at one in the morning.

Plenty of people have a stake in the outcome of tomorrow's fight, and Liddell is one of them: if Griffin wins, the Iceman gets his title shot, provided he can get past his next opponent, a young fighter named Rashard Evans. "I think he's got a good chance in this fight," Liddell says, looking wistfully out the window of his one-bedroom suite at the dying embers of the July 4 parties along the Strip. "Styles make fights, man." Griffin is longer, and in better shape, than Rampage, he continues. "I think he has a lot better shot than the plus-200," he says, of the most recent betting line on the fight. "Money will go back and forth, but..."

Liddell started learning karate when he was 12, and started fighting for money when he was still in his teens, in Bakersfield and Las Vegas and as far away as Thailand and Brazil. "You'd make a couple hundred bucks for your expenses, pretty much," he remembers of his early days in the sport. "A punch knockout, you get a bonus of a couple hundred bucks, and a couple hundred bucks more if it was a kick." From the time he was a kid, Liddell says, he loved to fight. "I always say I never started a fight," he says, pausing for a moment. "But I never let guys out of them too easy, either. I mean, I made you pretty much crawl out if you wanted to get out."

THE PAY-PER-VIEW BROADCAST starts at 7 p.m. on Saturday night and goes until ten. By five, maybe 3,000 people are already in their seats, most of them gathered in the upper reaches of the arena. Empty seats in the celebrity section are reserved for David Spade, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Mandy Moore, and Chuck Liddell. The supervising physician from the Nevada State Athletic Commission, whose name is Doc Brown, is the first to claim his seat at ringside. "I've probably worked 100 fights," he says, explaining that he is known in most professional circumstances as Steven Brown, M.D. When I ask him what the chances are that he will have to leave his seat tonight and enter the ring, he nods his head. "I'll be in there tonight, I guarantee it," he says. It's not that mixed martial arts is an especially brutal sport, he says, but rather that the fighters are so skilled that some form of injury is virtually guaranteed. Fractures and dislocations are common in mixed martial arts and boxing, he said. Head injuries happen in both sports, but the cuts in mixed-martial-arts fights are more frequent, and there is more bleeding. "Eight of 10 cuts you see have something to do with the scalp. It's extremely vascular," he says. Bleeding from the head looks horrendous, he explains, but it's rarely lethal.

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Behind us, Tito Ortiz and Jenna Jameson are taking their seats. Ortiz's face looks puffer than it did when he was fighting regularly, while the famous porn star looks ghastly. Her stick-figure legs are covered with tattoos, and a pair of angel wings sprouts from her back. Her eyes make her look like a Siamese cat, less vacant than otherworldly. She talks to Ortiz, greets her fans, looks exasperated, and plays with her hair, but the weird look in her eyes never goes away. It's like she is looking into an arctic hell where the sun never shines. She has a professional distaste for Dana White. "He started to compete with the fighters for attention," she tells me. "That's not good business."

Ring announcer Bruce Buffer, who has a disturbing baby face with the high pompadour of an auctioneer from the cattle lots in Oklahoma, steps into the octagon to introduce the card. Then Josh Koscheck methodically uses his elbow to open up cuts on Chris Lytle's face and head. By the time the fight ends, Koscheck's frosted blond hair is streaked with red, while Lytle staggers around the blood-drenched canvas like a slaughtered cow.

I head for the back of the arena, where I have arranged to meet the singer Mandy Moore, who arrives exactly on time for our date, accompanied by two publicists and her manager. She got interested in mixed martial arts a year ago, when her girlfriends brought her to a fight after a bad breakup. "It balances me out, because I'm a little bit boring, to be quite honest," Moore explains, brushing her light-brown hair away from her sweet teenybopper face. "I feel like it's one of the only things in my life that gives me a little edge."

I leave, and find Anthony Kiedis, the lead singer of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, standing at ringside. He is surprisingly geeky, with long, straight hair flanking his sallow face.

"It's something that requires being plugged into the universe in a very special way," the rock star explains, in the distanced, even-tempered tones of an introvert who twists and shouts onstage. "I admire the amount of time they put into it. I admire their tolerance for pain. It's a lot deeper than what meets the eye."

A FIGHTER'S DRESSING ROOM before a fight is a study in controlled anxiety. Some men pace, others hide. Inside Rampage's windowless dressing room, Ibarra is pacing around on the beige industrial carpet. Rampage's championship belts are laid out on the couch.

In the center of the room, Rampage is being stretched by three men. The hood of his sweatshirt is pulled up over his head as the men quietly work him over. "Push on my leg," Jackson demands. The men push down his butt and massage his shoulders, slowly and deeply, in preparation for the beating he will take. Jackson grunts softly. After a while, the stillness of the scene, and the occasional muffled sounds from the black-clad figure, take on the feel of a solemn ritual passage from one state of being to another, like the male equivalent of giving birth.

A man from the Nevada State Athletic Commission with Brylcreemed hair and a red jacket pokes his head through the door. "Let's get them gloves on," he says, checking Rampage's hands.

"Son, you want to put on your cup now?" Ibarra asks. He straps the cup over the champion's gray underwear as the fighter continues to take long, slow breaths. The silent 42-inch television screen in the center of the room shows men being repeatedly punched and kicked in the face. Rampage pulls his Nike shorts up over his cup, and then puts on his camouflage shorts with the Toyo Tires logo. Then he reaches up behind his neck and comes away with a white price tag, which had been dangling from his brand-new RAMPAGE T-shirt. "That would be embarrassing," he says, tossing the tag on the floor.

Ibarra puts on the gloves, which are then sealed with a layer of red tape and signed by the commission man, certifying that no foreign objects are inside. "Can you help me?" Rampage asks, gesturing at his taped-up hands and then to the bathroom. Ibarra accompanies his fighter to the toilet to help him pee.

Back in the dressing room, the trainer looks at his champion. "What are you going to do?"

"Defend my title," Rampage answers. He practices a body lock with Chris Reilly, who calls out commands. "Faster." "Drop." "Change levels." The two men grapple on the carpet about 18 inches from the place where I have chosen to squat. Seen up close, there is something completely abstract about this kind of fighting. The two men are figures in diagrams illustrating the science of leverage and pressure.

Ibarra looks at his watch. "Champ, can I have a word with you please?" he says, drawing the fighter into the bathroom for a quick conference. Rampage emerges 30 seconds later and clasps hands with each of the men who have helped him prepare for the fight. "I just want to thank all of you guys," he says, the emotion in his voice fighting with the imperative to save every last drop of his energy for the ring.

"Can I have a sip of water?" he asks Ibarra. As the fighter holds a disposable plastic cup of water between his gloves, Ibarra smears Vaseline on the outside of his wristband to apply to the fighter's face between rounds. The room falls silent again. The only sound is Rampage's slow, deep breathing.

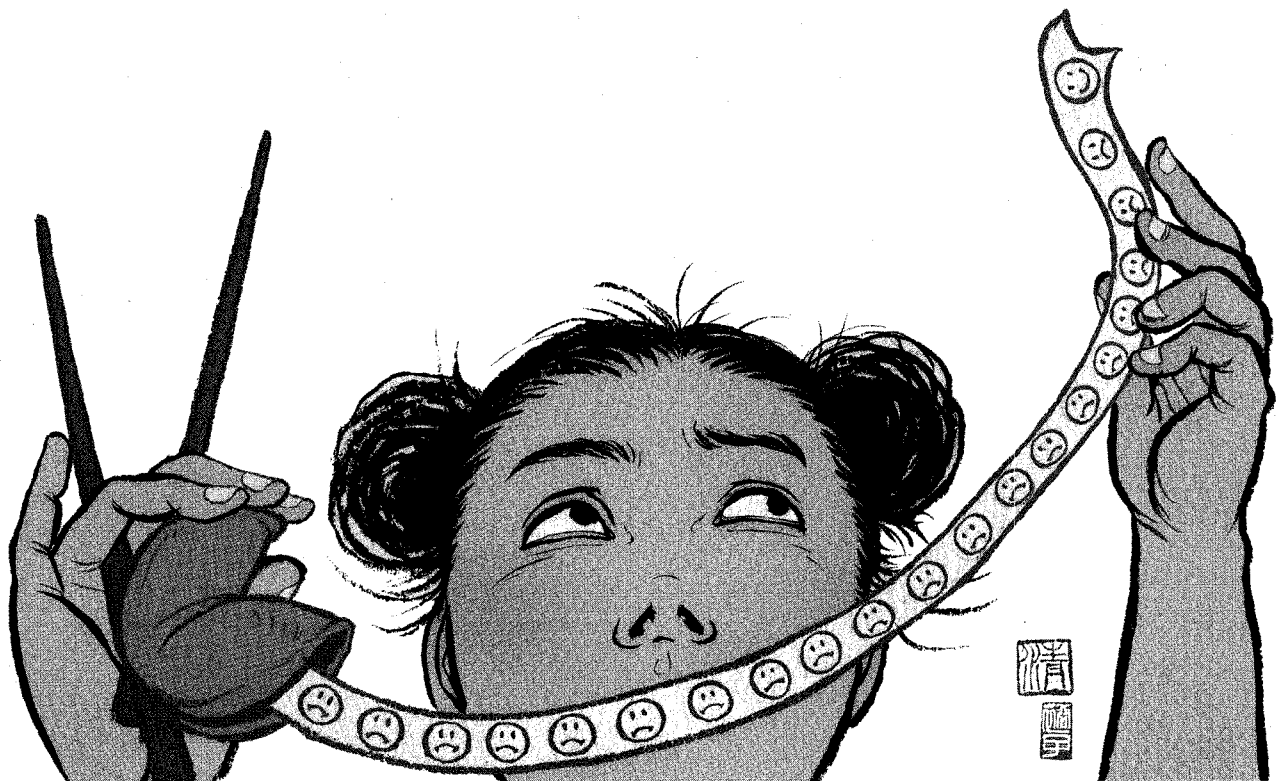
"Do you hear that rhythm?" Ibarra asks me. "That's his rhythm." The fighter takes off his hood to reveal a shaved head, and practices another clinch with Chris. He howls like a wolf, and then breathes deeply. "I need some more water," he says. The fighter looks over at me and gives me a long stare.

Ibarra gathers everyone together in the center of the room.

"Let's pray, fellows," he says, before asking for "no injuries, and victory in Jesus' name." The commission man raises up his head to speak.

"You got about two minutes before that walk," he says. "Two minutes before that walk."

Zach, Ibarra's assistant, takes Rampage's chain and wraps it around his neck. At the last minute, Ibarra grabs a scissors and cuts open the cuffs of Rampage's sweatshirt so he will be able to lift it over his head when he enters the ring, and then everyone goes out the door and into the cement-block corridor that leads to the ring. His hood is off as he readies himself for the plunge through the black curtain and into the sold-out arena filled with more than 11,000 screaming fans. Ibarra stops him. "Hey, Burt, he's the champion, he doesn't



go in first," he calls out to the man in charge of logistics. "The champ goes in second."

Rampage puts his hood back over his head and waits, a hulking, solitary figure breathing in and out in the fluorescent light.

FORREST GRIFFIN ENTERS the arena first, to a techno jig from the Dropkick Murphys followed by rising applause. Rampage enters next, to the sound of barking dogs. Reilly is carrying his UFC championship belt, while Ibarra trudges behind him. The crowd boos. Every few feet, someone yells out "Oh my God" like they've felt an earthquake. Rampage flashes his mouthpiece at the camera and snarls. There won't be any judges needed for the fight, Rampage promises in the taped pre-fight interview on the overhead video screen. Both men weigh 205 pounds. Griffin is two inches taller than Rampage, with a four-inch reach advantage. He bounces and dances inside the ring while Rampage stands and looks mean, which is a pretty good indication of how the fight is likely to go.

The referee is a bald-headed Canadian named Yves Lavigne. "Okay, gentlemen, UFC belt on the line, protect yourself at all times, obey my commands at all times. If you want to touch gloves, do it now, then go back to your corner," Lavigne says, following his spiel with a single one-word instruction: "Fight!"

Griffin starts off with a leg kick, then kicks Rampage again. The champion misses with an uppercut. Griffin kicks him in the head and then kicks him hard in the leg. Soon, a pattern is established. Griffin stands in the center of the ring and aims

kicks and punches at Rampage's head and upper body, using his length to keep the champion at a safe distance. When Rampage's guard is up, Griffin changes levels and kicks at his knee. With 3:17 left in the first round, Rampage hits Griffin with a powerful three-punch combination. Griffin recovers, and resumes kicking at Rampage's left leg. A minute later, Rampage lands a powerful left hook. Griffin wobbles, then recovers, and catches Rampage again on his left knee.

It is a simple and merciless strategy. With a minute left in the round, Rampage hits his opponent with a powerful uppercut and knocks him down, and then drags him to the side of the cage, where the stunned Griffin gets a precious 20 seconds on the ground to recover. Rampage appears to let him stand up, steps back, and lands another powerful punch. Then he kicks Griffin hard in the side.

In the confusion of Griffin's corner between rounds, I can hear one sentence repeated twice: "You're hurting his fucking leg." The fighter nods. About six seconds into Round Two, Griffin kicks Rampage's left leg, and then kicks him again. As Rampage's knee buckles, Griffin rushes at the injured champion and catches him in a guillotine hold and tries to choke him out.

Unable to stand, Rampage falls to the canvas, where he spends the remaining four minutes and 48 seconds as Griffin hits him in the face with his elbows and forearms while the crowd makes a sound like an airplane taking off. When the round ends, Rampage gets up and limps to his corner. He's still in the fight. "I want you to breathe. I want you to breathe," Ibarra tells him, looking into the face of his injured fighter. "Don't worry about that leg."

RESURRUM

In the third round, a new pattern emerges: Griffin aims at the injured leg, and whenever Rampage moves to protect it, Griffin kicks him in the head. Rampage's big punches keep missing their target by three or four inches, but their scary velocity seems to inhibit Griffin from getting any closer to his crippled opponent.

By the fourth round, Rampage's leg seems to loosen up, and he fights the fight that I saw him fight against his invisible opponent at the warehouse on Thursday night, landing powerful three-, four-, and five-punch combinations, taking Griffin down, cutting his face, and pounding him into the canvas as the crowd cheers. It is a dominant performance, the only problem being that it is happening in the fourth round of the fight. In the fifth and final round, neither fighter shows much sense of desperation. With two minutes left, Rampage hits Griffin with a powerful body shot, and Griffin kicks him again, and then hits him with a hard right. The bout ends and the two fighters embrace.

The referee prepares to raise one fighter's hand in victory. Griffin starts to pull his hand away, then looks startled by the deafening noise that greets the words *new world champion*. Judge Adalaide Byrd had Rampage winning the last two rounds and Griffin the first three, while Nelson Hamilton had Rampage winning the first round and the fourth round and Roy Silbert had Griffin winning every round except the fourth.

"Did they see the same fight we did?" the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* guy asks. "Are you kidding me?"

As Rampage exits the ring, away from the cameras, it is clear that he can't really walk. He leans on Ibarra for support on his way back down the cement-block corridor to his dressing room, where fighters and their entourages line the hallway.

"You fought like a champion!"

"Terrible decision."

WHEN JACKSON GETS to the room, his UFC belt is gone. The fighter looks stunned. "They take my belt?" he asks. He unwraps his gloves for the post-fight exam by the commission doctor. He will need X-rays of his thumb, left knee, and tibia, but nothing appears to be badly broken, and the doctor agrees that he can wait until tomorrow to go to the hospital. Griffin will spend most of the night in the emergency room.

"You worked hard, champ," Chris Reilly says.

"Forrest worked hard, too," Jackson says. He looks down at the bloody purple bruise on his trembling left hand, which has been released from its wrapping of tape and gauze. "I got bloody boogers," he complains, raising his hand to his nose.

Dana White arrives and takes Ibarra into the bathroom for a private conference, before emerging to talk with Rampage. "You took it like a champ, instead of saying anything stupid," he says, putting his hand on the fighter's shoulder.

"He's my son. I'm proud. He rested. He used his brain," Ibarra said. "He came back and took the fight to Forrest on one leg."

Now there are only five people left in the room. "Where's my shoes?" Rampage asks. "Don't tell me I left my shoes by the fucking cage." He looks down at his chest. "Nobody put my chain on me after the fight?"

He trudges down the hallway to the post-fight press conference, leaning on Ibarra's shoulder for support. He limps past the soda machine, where he is stopped for a moment by the magician Criss Angel. "That will make you stronger," he says earnestly, adding, "Sometimes the journey is better than the destination."

Rampage blinks. I am now the only one left in the fighter's entourage. "You know what?" he confides. "I didn't think Forrest could hang with me." He looks me in the eye and asks whether I thought he won the fight. I tell him that he won the first and the fourth rounds but maybe backed off a bit in the fifth. He nods.

At 2 a.m. I catch up with Dana White at the House of Blues.

"He went in there with a smart plan," I say of Griffin.

"A fucking great game plan. And it worked because he did end up hurting that leg." We talk about this and that for a while, and then I ask White what he talked about with Juanito Ibarra in the bathroom after the fight. The promoter's face darkens.

"I'm not a Juanito fan," he says. "He was mad because what he said, on the countdown show, he said, 'I'll fucking retire if Forrest Griffin beats Rampage Jackson.' And fucking one of the dudes called him on it. One of the cut men said, 'Are you retiring now, motherfucker?'"

"He does love his fighters, though," I answer. "That's one good thing about him."

"I hope he does," White answers. "If Rampage goes on a skid—let's say he goes on a skid now. He lost this fight tonight, and he loses four more after it. And is kicked out of the UFC, retires from fighting. Right? Is Juanito gonna be with him for the rest of his life? I dunno. What do you think?"

I don't know those guys well enough, I respond.

White looks at me hard.

"Nobody knows anybody well enough," he answers.

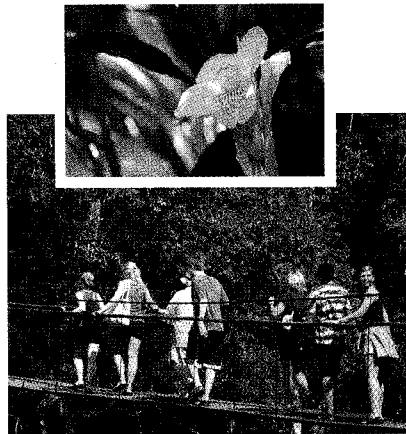
TEN DAYS LATER, I read the following news story on a mixed-martial-arts Web site:

Quinton "Rampage" Jackson arrested at gunpoint after a chase in Costa Mesa, Calif. ...

Rampage, who relinquished his UFC belt on July 5 by unanimous decision to Forrest Griffin, plowed his 2008 Ford F-250, complete with his image emblazoned on rear driver- and passenger-side doors, into multiple cars along Highway 55.

The story ends with the line, "Jackson's trainer, Juanito Ibarra, did not immediately return phone calls." Internet

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rumors suggest that Jackson had gone off the deep end and fired his trainer, who had been caught stealing from him.

I go to a boutique hotel in Minneapolis, where Lorenzo Fertitta and Dana White are staying for a UFC bout. They had promised to tell me what they knew and let me see the fighter for myself. A week after the fight in Las Vegas, White says, he and Fertitta had dinner with Rampage up at the Red Rock Casino for what White expected would be a business meeting. The fighter seemed uninterested in talking business and ignored his food. Instead, he told the UFC president and the company's billionaire owner how his cousins and brothers and sisters used to torment him. "They'd get him all fired up and he'd go crazy, and they'd laugh and call him Rampage," White remembers. "After the dinner, me and Lorenzo were like, 'Hmm. That wasn't the dinner we were expecting.'"

When pictures of Jackson plowing through traffic hit the Web, White says he immediately got on a plane, and arrived at the police station before the fighter. "I called Lorenzo and our attorney at three in the morning, after I saw Rampage that night, and I'm like, 'You guys have no fucking idea what I just saw. You have no idea what I just saw.'" The next day, the police went to Jackson's home and took him to a psychiatric ward, where he was held for 72 hours. The immediate diagnosis was that the fighter was suffering from delirium induced by severe dehydration, reportedly caused by a week of staying up all night on energy drinks. When he was arrested, he hadn't eaten or slept in four days.

As a publicist goes off to find the fighter, I ask White whom Rampage will fight next.

"It's probably gonna be him and Wanderlei Silva," White says.

"But Silva knocked him out twice," I object.

"Yeah," he answers with a shrug.

The prospect of Rampage being sent out in his current condition, having lost his title and his trainer, to fight a man who has already knocked him out twice, seems unnecessarily cruel. When I ask White whether he has suggested to Rampage that he might be better off with a different opponent, he shrugs again.

"This is the fight business, man. It's a rough business."

Rampage Jackson walks into the room, wearing sunglasses and a big smile. When he takes off the glasses, his face is puffy and bruised. I ask him to tell me what he did in the week after the fight.

"You know, what a lot of people don't understand about me is, I have fun," he says. "I laugh and joke around all the time. My life is a fun life."

I ask him why, during that time, he stopped eating food and drinking water.

"I learned something about somebody I loved, and I still love to this day. I love him dearly, and it hurt me," he says. "I stopped eating and stopped sleeping. I get touched by God, because I'm reading the Bible and I'm staying up and I'm fasting, and when you're fasting, you get close to God."

He was afraid to go to sleep, because he was close to God, and when God or Jesus reveals himself to you, the devil comes too, he says. After he came back home from the police station, he had everyone in his house reading the Bible. His

door was open. People he didn't know came in and out of his house. "This one guy I never seen before in my life, Asian dude, came to my door," Jackson tells me. "I said, 'If you're a child of God, you can just walk into my house. If you're not a child of God, you can't.' I remember saying that. That's about the only thing I remember."

A waiter comes to our table, and Jackson says he's hungry and orders a hamburger. He is clearly functional, and yet, at the same time, he seems less robust than he was when I first met him. He is a proud man whose personality seems shot through with holes. Listening to him talk is like watching him try to fight on one leg. I ask him whether he thinks it's a good idea to fight Silva so soon after being released from a psychiatric ward.

"Go back and watch that fight. I was kicking the hell out of Wanderlei," he says. "Wanderlei has been a thorn in my side for a while. I want to fight him. Also Shogun, Sakuraba," he continues, naming a few other fighters. "I want to fight Forrest too, later."

When I suggest that Rampage wants to fight everyone who ever beat him, he nods.

"I feel like I'm the best fighter in the world. If I fight at close to 100 percent, no one can beat me," he answers.

It is unclear why Rampage believes he is anywhere near 100 percent. The fact that he is putting Forrest Griffin at the end of his list implies that Dana White may have told him he will not be fighting for the title anytime soon.

"Have you been treated for depression?" I ask him.

"No. I'm not depressed. Do I seem depressed?" he asks me. "I'm happy—you see why I drive around laughing at stuff all the time? Do I look like a depressed person?"

He has been courteous to me for six weeks. He is tired of answering questions.

"Have you ever been a fighter?" he asks me, leaning forward across the table.

"Nope."

"You ever get your ass whupped?" he asks.

Once, I answer.

"How you feel after that ass-whupping?"

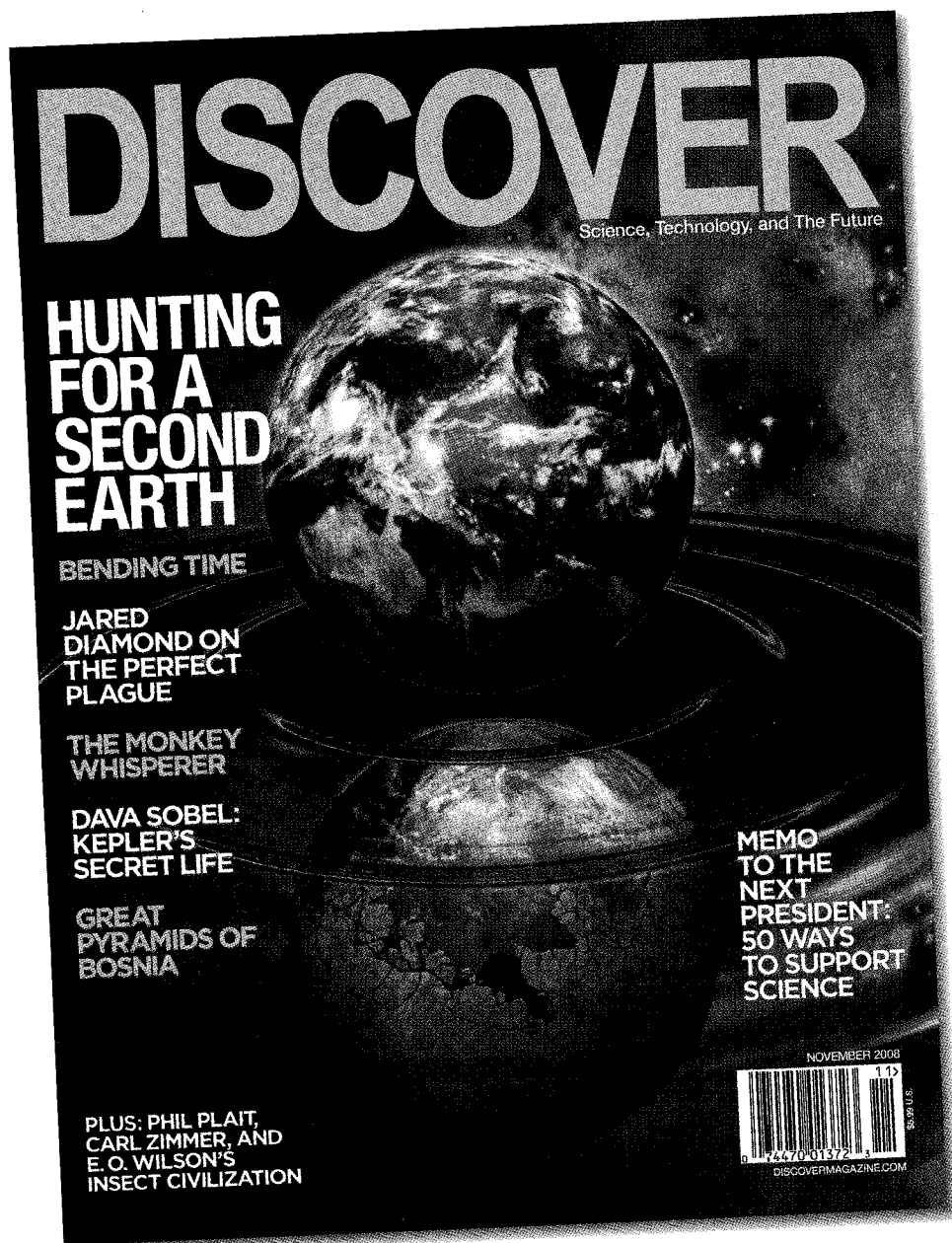
I tell him I felt unhappy enough that I never considered a career as a fighter.

Rampage looks at me across the remains of his burger. "Well, we got two different experiences. Two different hearts. I have the heart of a samurai. I have samurai spirit. God made me to be a fighter," he says. "You know how many fights I've been in my whole life? Over a thousand, man. This is what I was made to do."

He puts his face up close to mine. His eyes are tightly focused, and the wheels inside his head are spinning too fast. "Just watch my next fight and you'll be drooling," he says. "Watch it! The mind is the strongest thing in your body," he adds, reaching out to me with both hands from across the table. "There's a reason why you only use 10 percent of your brain. You got to learn how to use the rest of your brain, homie. Your mind is real strong. Strongest thing I got." ■

David Samuels is the author of Only Love Can Break Your Heart, a collection of essays and reporting, and The Runner: A True Account of the Amazing Adventures and Fantastical Lies of the Ivy League Imposter James Hogue.

LET YOUR GEEK FLAG FLY

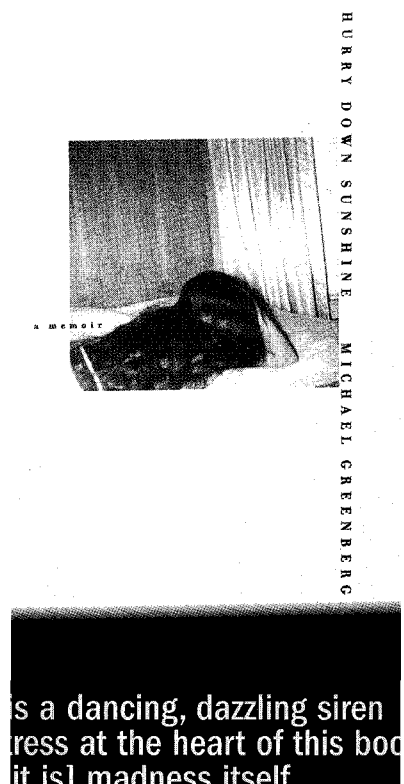
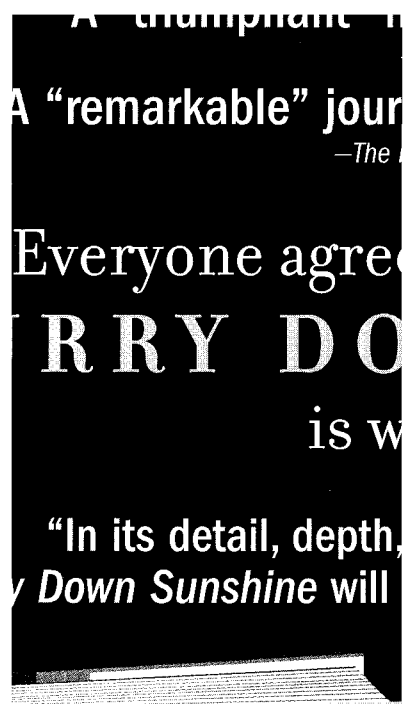


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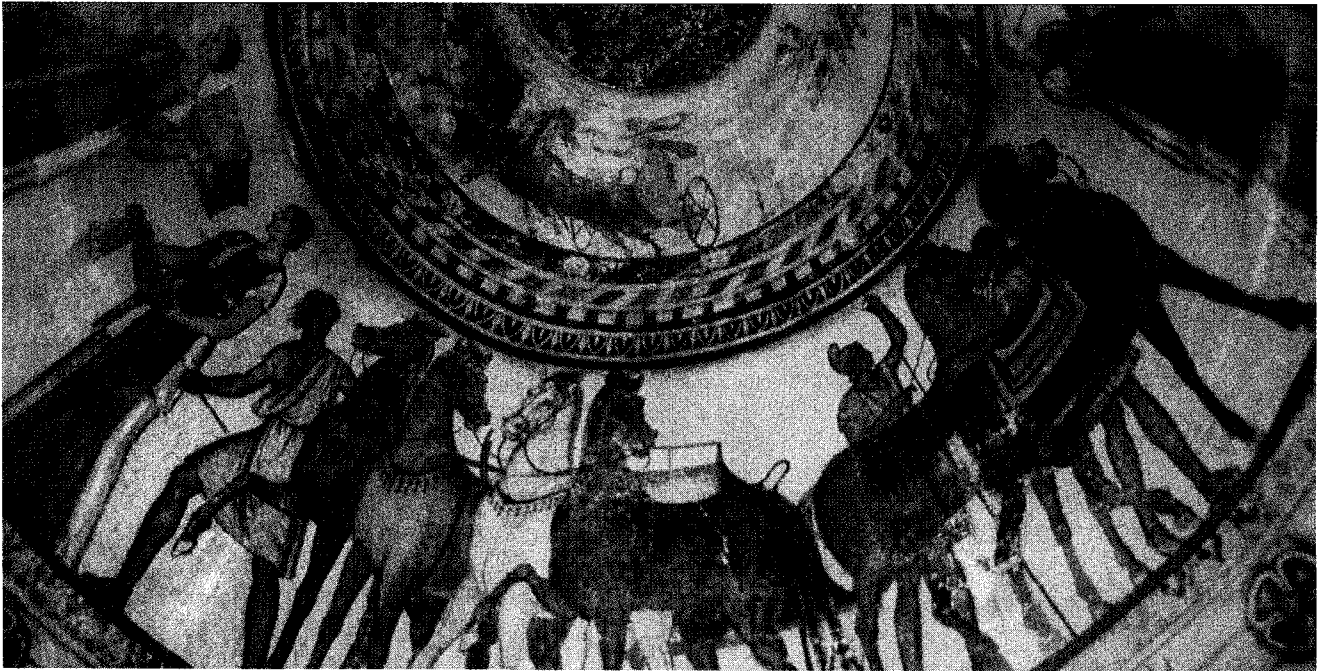
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BOOKS

105 EDITOR'S CHOICE: Geography Is Destiny TRUTH AND BEAUTY IN ARCHAEOLOGY *By Benjamin Schwarz* • **108 What Girls Want** SEX AND ROMANCE (AND VAMPIRES) ECSTATICALLY, DANGEROUSLY ENGAGED *By Caitlin Flanagan* • **122 Suburbs of Our Discontent** THE QUIET DESPERATION OF SUBURBAN LEGENDS *By Christopher Hitchens* • **130 Cover to Cover** SMACK AND THE CITY; MERRIE OLDE MOTOWNE; ACCIDENTAL AUTHORITARIANS; THE GREAT FEATHER FRENZY; AND MORE



Worlds collide: Hellenistic images on the dome of a Thracian tomb in Bulgaria

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Geography Is Destiny

AN EPOCHAL NEW BOOK ARGUES THAT THE EVENTS OF HISTORY WE THINK CONSEQUENTIAL AND MONUMENTAL ARE, MOSTLY, TRIVIA.

By Benjamin Schwarz

GREAT ARCHAEOLOGISTS ARE often at war with themselves. They aim to explain seismic transformations—social and cultural, economic, demographic, even genetic. But they do so by sifting (literally and figuratively) physical evidence that's scant and (literally and figuratively) fragmentary. These methods mean that nearly all their publications are narrow and exceedingly

dry, even by academic standards. And even on those rare occasions when they venture beyond the journal article or monograph, their writing seldom tempts even the most archaeologically besotted general reader. For

instance, although the great archaeologist of Mesopotamia Robert McCormick Adams has revolu-

tionized scholars' understanding of the origins of urban civilization, his over-size tomes, with their detailed maps of

watercourses and settlement patterns and meticulous charts of pottery types, resemble field reports, not works of history. But because archaeology addresses the most basic questions and explores the most profound changes in

human history by means of a grossly incomplete record—and perhaps because it was long the province of aristocrats and buccaneers—it

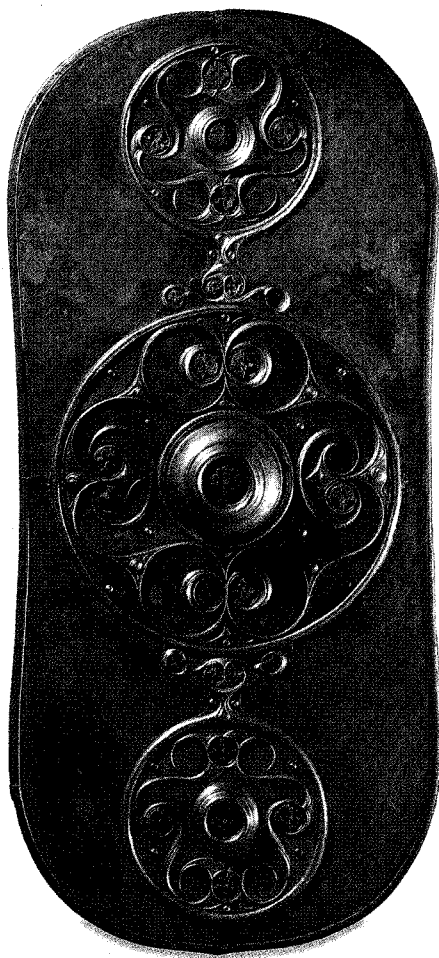
has invited the sort of bold interpretations in which speculation can too easily become untethered from evidence.



EUROPE BETWEEN THE OCEANS

By Barry Cunliffe

YALE



The Battersea Shield, dating back to the Iron Age, was found in the Thames.

When archaeology is done right, it's frequently dull; when it's fascinating, it's frequently wrong.

So *Europe Between the Oceans*, at once compelling and judicious, is an extraordinary book. In a work of analytical depth and imaginative sweep, Sir Barry Cunliffe, the emeritus professor of European archaeology at Oxford, has synthesized the voluminous recent record of excavations from Iceland to Turkey, the burgeoning scholarship on DNA and ancient populations, and research on topics ranging from Stone Age shipbuilding to trade in Muslim Spain and from salinity levels in the ancient Black Sea to state formation in Early Iron Age Denmark. This all serves to elucidate the "complex interaction of human groups with their environment, and with each other" in Europe from 9000 B.C. to 1000 A.D.—10,000 years of cultural, social, and material development, starting at the close of the last ice age and ending with the emergence of the European nation-states.

Cunliffe's approach will jar readers accustomed to being informed of the epoch-making quality of every inauguration speech. Not for him "the events and personalities flitting on the surface" of conventional history. Rather, he focuses resolutely on the underlying forces—primarily geography and

climate—that influenced societies, and specifically on the ways those forces shaped and constrained the "intricate social networks by means of which commodities were exchanged and ideas and beliefs were disseminated." Cunliffe is intellectually indebted to Fernand Braudel and the *Annales* school of French economic and social historians, which emphasized largely static environmental influences and long-term historical continuity and regarded political events as little more than trivia. The *Annales* approach works better for the millennia Cunliffe examines, in which very, very few individuals can even be identified, than for the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the periods Braudel assessed.

Geography forms the essential basis of Cunliffe's history. The waters encircling Europe, the transpeninsular rivers that penetrated it, and its topography, currents, tides, and seasonal wind patterns all determined millennia-old sailing routes, and thus the goods and beliefs transported along them. From Cunliffe's perspective, even the Roman Empire was just an interlude, and perhaps its main achievement was to institutionalize through its ports, roads, and market centers Europe-wide networks of exchange that had been operating since the Middle Stone Age.

Books of the Year

THE BEST OF 2008

EUROPE BETWEEN THE OCEANS: 9000 BC to AD 1000

By Barry Cunliffe (Yale)

BEETHOVEN WAS ONE-SIXTEENTH BLACK and Other Stories

By Nadine Gordimer (FSG)

NUREYEV: The Life

By Julie Kavanagh (Pantheon)

AUSTERITY BRITAIN: 1945–51

By David Kynaston (Bloomsbury)

NETHERLAND

By Joseph O'Neill (Pantheon)

OLIVE KITTERIDGE

By Elizabeth Strout (Random House)



TOP: THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM;
LEFT: JILLIAN TAMAKI

By stressing historical continuity and adroitly employing a wide-ranging archaeological record to highlight mobility and interconnectedness, Cunliffe draws a startling picture. Europe, he demonstrates, was geographically and culturally merely “the western excrescence of the continent of Asia.” His archaeological and topographic analysis shows how for thousands of years the steppe lands linked central Asia to the Great Hungarian Plain, thus providing “easy access” from China to the Atlantic Ocean. Here was a corridor for trade and migration, starting with nomadic groups deep in prehistory and continuing through the preclassical, classical, medieval, and early modern eras with great hordes of Cimmerians, Scythians, Sarmatians, Alans, Huns, Magyars, Bulgars, Moguls, and Tatars. Knowledge of, for example, the chariot seems to have moved from the Russian forest steppe (the earliest known examples date to 2800 B.C.) to the Carpathian basin in Hungary and, by the 16th century B.C., to Mycenaean Greece and Sweden. Sarmatian horsemen, originally from central Asia, served in northern England as mercenaries in the Roman army.

By water and over land, through far-flung webs of trade and tribute, the most disparate cultures reached and changed each other. The beliefs and technologies behind megalithic tombs found along Europe’s Atlantic coast as far north as the Orkneys spread to Minoan Crete by 3000 B.C. Identical amber jewelry is found only in southern Britain and Mycenaean Greek sites, strongly suggesting direct contact between the societies of Homeric Greece and prehistoric Britain. Images of the same type of warrior are found in Sardinia, Egypt, and Scandinavia by about 1300 B.C. Archaic Greek building techniques were used in southern Germany in the sixth century B.C. At a Dark Ages trading center in central Sweden, active from the sixth through ninth centuries A.D., archaeologists have excavated coins from the eastern and western Roman empires, a ladle from Egypt, a bishop’s crosier from Ireland, and a bronze statue of Buddha from India. In the Byzantium of the 900s, the Varangian guard was made up wholly of Scandinavian mercenaries. “It may have been a member of the guard,” Cunliffe notes, “who scratched his name,

Halfdan, in runes ... in the church of Hagia Sophia, leaving a poignant reminder of the confrontation of two very different cultures.”

LAVISHLY ILLUSTRATED and replete with a sumptuous array of creatively conceived color maps, Cunliffe’s book is further proof that its publisher produces the most beautiful and intelligently designed works of scholarship in the humanities. I can’t think of a better gift this year for the historically minded reader. No book so well exemplifies what Cunliffe joyously calls “the vibrancy of archaeology.” More important, its focus on what Braudel called the *longue durée* will jolt the temporally complacent (and aren’t we all?), just as its bracingly materialist approach—which leads to the inescapable conclusion that trade has always laid the foundation for the exchange of ideas and beliefs, indeed for most cultural transformations—nicely tempers our blather about the power of ideas and the individual.

To splurge, give this book with Norman Davies’s panoramic, stylish doorstop, *Europe: A History*—a work that takes the Continent’s story up to the end of the Cold War and is as sensitive as Cunliffe’s to the linkages between geography and history—and Peter Spufford’s gorgeously and informatively illustrated *Power and Profit*, the definitive history of medieval commerce, which continues the specific story of Europe’s exchange networks where Cunliffe leaves off, and which similarly conveys the topographic and climatic backdrop of and hindrances to trade.

These books contain hardly anything about the great deeds of Great Men, and none offers much to flatter our images of ourselves. But in their marriage of exactitude and far-reaching vision, they clarify the scale of the human enterprise and remind us that the events that seem so significant today are, as Braudel put it, little more than “surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs.” And they remind us, as he adds, that “we must learn to distrust them.” ■

Benjamin Schwarz is The Atlantic’s literary editor and national editor.

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What Girls Want

A SERIES OF VAMPIRE NOVELS ILLUMINATES
THE COMPLEXITIES OF FEMALE ADOLESCENT DESIRE.

By Caitlin Flanagan

CHILDREN'S BOOKS ABOUT divorce—which are unanimously dedicated to bucking up those unfortunate little nippers whose families have gone belly-up—ask a lot of their authors. Their very premise, however laudable, so defies the nature of modern children's literature (which, since the Victorian age, has centered on a sentimental portrayal of the happy, intact family) that the enterprise seems doomed from the title. Since the 1950s, children have delighted in the Little Bear books (Mother Bear: "I never did forget your birthday, and I never will")—but who wants to find a copy of Cornelia Maude Spelman's *Mama and Daddy Bear's Divorce* wedged onto the shelf? Still, the volumes fill a need: helping children understand that life on the other side of the custody hearing can still be happy and hopeful, that a broken family is not a ruined one.

But pick up a novel written for adolescents in which the main character is a child of divorce, and you're in very different waters. Divorce in a young-adult novel means what being orphaned meant in a fairy tale: vulnerability, danger, unwanted independence. It also means that the protagonists must confront the sexuality of their parents at the moment they least want to think about such realities. It introduces into a household the adult passions and jealousies that have long gone to ground in most middle-aged parents, a state of affairs that is particularly difficult for girls, who have a more complicated attitude toward their own emerging sexuality than do boys, and who are far more rooted in the domestic routines and traditions of their families, which constitute the vital link between the sweet cocooning of childhood and their impending departure from it.

The only thing as difficult for a girl as a divorce—if we are to judge from stories aimed at the teen market—is a move. Relocating is what led to the drug addiction, prostitution, and death that freaked out a generation of readers in *Go Ask Alice*, and to the teenybopper dipsomania of *Sarah T.: Portrait of a Teenage Alcoholic*. In the most perfectly constructed young-adult novel of the

past few decades, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, Judy Blume heightened the anxiety in her tale of a girl awaiting her first period

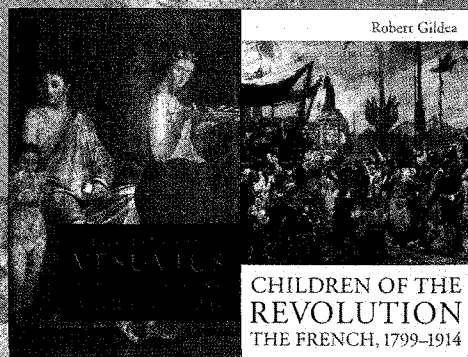
by beginning the story with Margaret's move to the suburbs. The drama and anguish with which girls confront such disruptions to their domestic lives are typical both of the narcissism that can make living with a teenage girl one of the most unpleasant experiences God metes out to the unsuspecting, and of the ways that, for women, puberty is the most psychologically complex and

THE TWILIGHT SAGA

By Stephenie Meyer

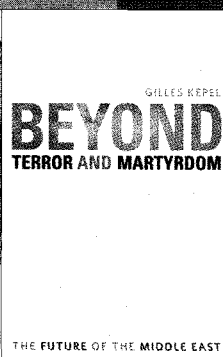
LITTLE, BROWN

ADAM S. DOYLE



Robert Gildea

**CHILDREN OF THE
REVOLUTION**
THE FRENCH, 1799–1914



GILLES KEPEL

**BEYOND
TERROR AND MARTYRDOM**

THE FUTURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

TIM BLANNING



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PETER
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emotionally alive experience of their lives. Why wouldn't a girl buck against leaving her hometown? Never again will she have such intense friendships, such a burning need to be in constant contact with the circle of girls (the best friend, the second-best friend, the whole court as carefully considered and clearly delineated as a bridal party) who sustain her through their shared experience of the epic event of female adolescence.

TWILIGHT IS THE FIRST in a series of four books that are contenders for the most popular teen-girl novels of all time. (The movie based on the first book was released in November.) From the opening passage of the first volume, the harbingers of trouble loom: 17-year-old Bella Swan is en route to the Phoenix airport, where she will be whisked away from her beloved, sunny hometown and relocated to the much-hated Forks, Washington, a nearly aquatic hamlet of deep fogs and constant rains. The reason for the move is that Mom (a self-absorbed, childlike character) has taken up with a minor-league baseball player, and traveling with him has become more appealing than staying home with her only child. Bella will now be raised by her father, an agreeable-enough cipher, who seems mildly pleased to have his daughter come to live with him, but who evinces no especial interest in getting to know her; they begin a cohabitation as politely distant and mutually beneficial as a particularly successful roommate matchup off Craigslist. Bella's first day at her new school is a misery: the weather is worse than she could ever have imagined, and the one silvery lining to the disaster is the mystery and intrigue presented by a small group of students—adopted and foster children of the same household—who eat lunch together, speak to no one else, are mesmerizingly attractive, and (as we come rather quickly to discover) are vampires. Bella falls in love with one of them, and the novel—as well as the three that follow it—concerns the dangers and dramatic consequences of that forbidden love.

I hate Y.A. novels; they bore me. That's a disappointing fact of my reading

life, because never have I had such an intense relationship with books as when I was a young girl. I raged inside them and lived a double emotional life (half real girl, half inhabitant of a distant world). *To Sir, With Love* and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, *Forever and Rebecca*, *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones* and *Mrs. Mike*, *Gone With the Wind* and *Rich Man, Poor Man*, and even *Valley of the Dolls* (an astonishing number of whose 8 million readers turned out to be teenagers) and *Peyton Place*, as well as any movie-star biography I could get my hands on (Judy Garland, Greta Garbo—in those days, you had to have been long dead or seriously faded to be worthy of such a biography) and a slew of far less famous books written exclusively for the teen-girl market and published in paperback, never to be heard of again—all

of these books consumed me in a way that no other works of art or mass culture ever have. I chose books neither because of, nor in spite of, their artistic merit, only for their ability to pull me through the looking glass.

When I read in "The Dead" that Lily was "literally run off her feet," I did not care about, or even notice, the misuse of the word *literally*, nor did it occur to me to observe that this subtle deployment of a Dublin colloquialism hinted at the story's point of view. What I cared about, intensely, was what it would feel like to be sent running up and down the stairs of a house as a teenage maid, with holiday gaieties in full force, and everyone being mean to me, instead of pampering and babying me the way my parents did on Christmas Eve. I can remember lying on my bed in a Dublin row house at 15, so immersed in Margaret Mitchell that I faked three days of illness to keep reading, and I remember lying in my own bed in Berkeley—the cat dozing at my feet, the bay wind brushing the tree branches against my dormer windows—and roaring through *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* completely at home in turn-of-the-century Williamsburg, a

place I had never even heard of before picking up the book but which I could navigate, in the landscape of my imagination, as easily as I could the shady streets and secret hillside staircases that connected my house to the record shop and ice-cream parlor down on Euclid Avenue.

The salient fact of an adolescent girl's existence is her need for a secret emotional life—one that she slips into

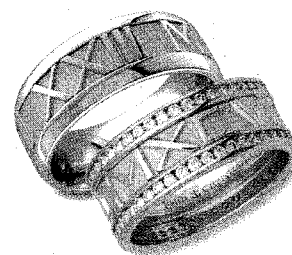
The salient fact of an adolescent girl's existence is her need for a secret emotional life—one that she slips into during her sulks and silences.

during her sulks and silences, during her endless hours alone in her room, or even just when she's gazing out the classroom window while all of Modern European History, or the niceties of the *passé composé*, sluice past her. This means that she is a creature designed for reading in a way no boy or man, or even grown woman, could ever be so exactly designed, because she

is a creature whose most elemental psychological needs—to be undisturbed while she works out the big questions of her life, to be hidden from view while still in plain sight, to enter profoundly into the emotional lives of others—are met precisely by the act of reading.

TWILIGHT IS FANTASTIC. It's a page-turner that pops out a lurching, frightening ending I never saw coming. It's also the first book that seemed at long last to rekindle something of the girl-reader in me. In fact, there were times when the novel—no work of literature, to be sure, no school for style; hugged mainly to the slender chests of very young teenage girls, whose regard for it is on a par with the regard with which just yesterday they held *Hannah Montana*—stirred something in me so long forgotten that I felt embarrassed by it. Reading the book, I sometimes experienced what I imagine long-married men must feel when they get an unexpected glimpse at pornography: slingshot back to a world of sensation that, through sheer force of will and dutiful acceptance of life's fortunes, I thought I had subdued. The

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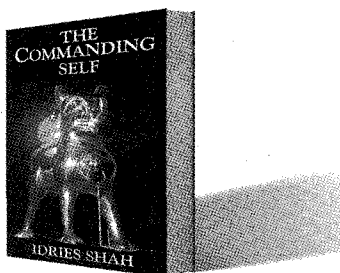


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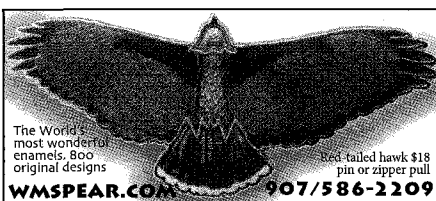
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Twilight series is not based on a true story, of course, but within it is *the* true story, the original one. *Twilight* centers on a boy who loves a girl so much that he refuses to defile her, and on a girl who loves him so dearly that she is desperate for him to do just that, even if the wages of the act are expulsion from her family and from everything she has ever known. We haven't seen that tale in a girls' book in a very long time. And it's selling through the roof.

Bella and Edward meet on that unpleasant first day of school, in biology class. The only free spot in the room is next to Edward, a vacancy she initially falls into with a glimmer of excitement—like Dracula's Lucy and Mina, and like every other young woman who has ever come to the attention of a vampire, Bella is enthralled. But Edward demonstrates none of the pickup-artist smoothness of his kind. As she glances shyly at him before sitting down, he meets her eyes "with the strangest expression on his face—it was hostile, furious." As she takes the seat beside him, he leans away from her, "sitting on the extreme edge of his chair and averting his face like he smelled something bad."

In short, Edward treats Bella not as Count Dracula treated the objects of his desire, but as Mr. Rochester treated Jane Eyre. He evinces the most profound disdain and distaste for this girl. Even after they have confessed their love for each other, he will still occasionally glare at and speak sharply to her. At the end of that long first day at Forks High, Bella goes to the school office to drop off some paperwork, and who is there but Edward—trying to get himself transferred out of the class they share.

And yet they are such kindred spirits! They are both crackerjack biology students (Bella because she took an AP course back in Phoenix, and Edward because he has taken the class God knows how many times, given that he is actually 104 years old); they both love

the arts; they share a dim view of the many young men who would be Bella's suitors if only she would take an interest in them. All of these facts, combined with Edward's languid, androgynous beauty—slim and feline, possessed of tousled hair and golden eyes—predictably anger and confuse Bella, although they do nothing to cool her awakening physical passion for her smoldering, obdurate antagonist. (This poignant aspect of the female heart proves once again a theory advanced by a high-school chum of mine, an improbable

lothario who replied when I demanded that he explain his freakish success with the ladies: "Chicks thrive on rejection.") Edward puts the young girl into a state of emotional confusion and vulnerability that has been at the heart of female romantic awakening since the beginning of time.

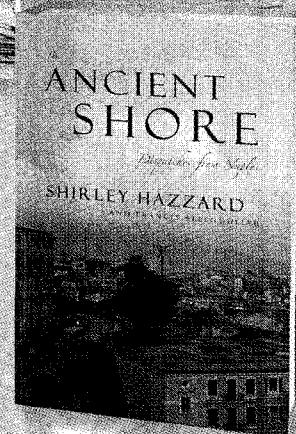
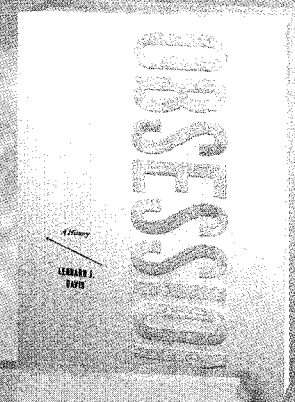
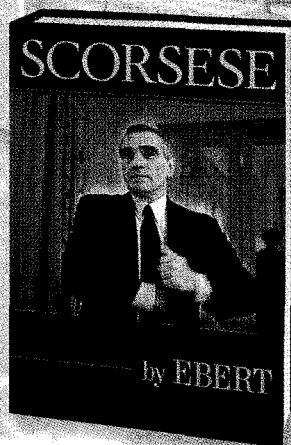
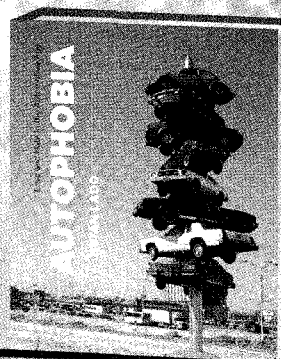
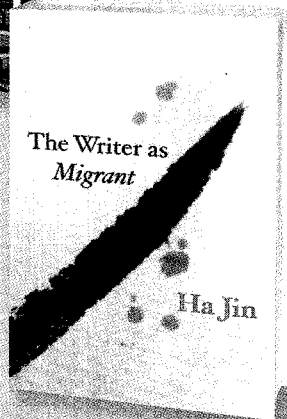
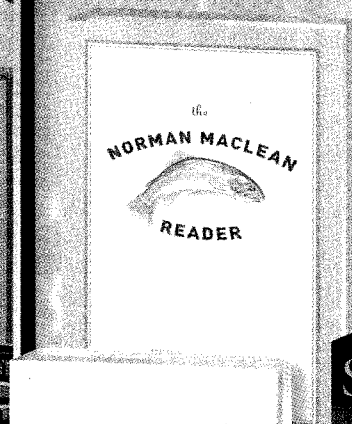
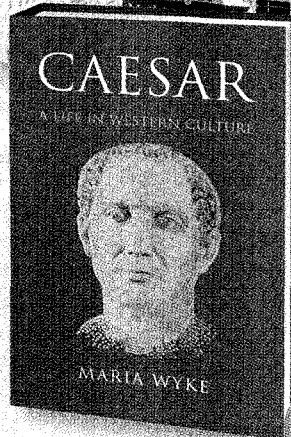
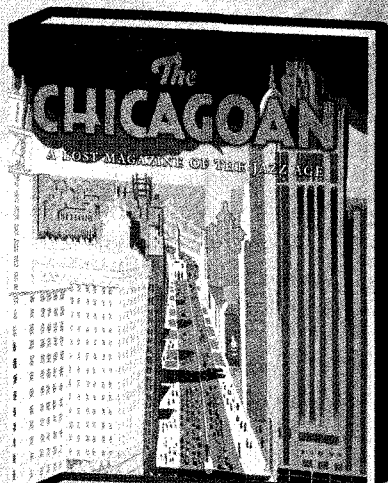
Bella is an old-fashioned heroine: bookish, smart, brave, considerate of others' emotions, and naturally compe-

tent in the domestic arts (she immediately takes over the grocery shopping and cooking in her father's household, and there are countless, weirdly compelling accounts of her putting dinner together—wrapping two potatoes in foil and popping them into a hot oven, marinating a steak, making a green salad—that are reminiscent of the equally alluring domestic scenes in *Rosemary's Baby*). Indeed, the book, which is set in contemporary America and centers on teenage life and culture, carries a strange—and I imagine deeply comforting to its teenage-girl readers—aura of an earlier time in American life and girlhood. The effect is subtle, and probably unintentional on the part of its author, a first-time novelist, who was home with three small boys when she blasted out this marvelous book. Like the Harry Potter series, the *Twilight* books are ostensibly set in the present, but—in terms of the mores, attitudes, and even the central elements of daily life portrayed within them—clearly evoke the culture of the author's adolescence.

***Twilight* centers
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It is difficult to know how best to measure a student's success or the worth of a program to a writer. Our graduates have won every major award in each of their genres, including, in playwriting, the Charles MacArthur Award and six national playwriting awards from the American College Theater Festival; in poetry, The Whiting Award, the Norma Farber First Book Award, along with three winners of the Discovery/The Nation Award and two winners of the National Poetry Series; in fiction our graduates have won the Pulitzer Prize, the PEN/Faulkner, the PEN/Hemingway, and the National Book Award. Every month one of our graduates brings out a book of poetry or fiction with a major publisher; and some, like Sue Miller and Arthur Golden, have spent a good deal of time on bestseller lists. Over the last decade we have placed more than a score of our graduates in tenure-track positions at important universities (Peter Ho Davies and Carl Phillips direct the creative writing programs at Michigan and Washington University in St. Louis).

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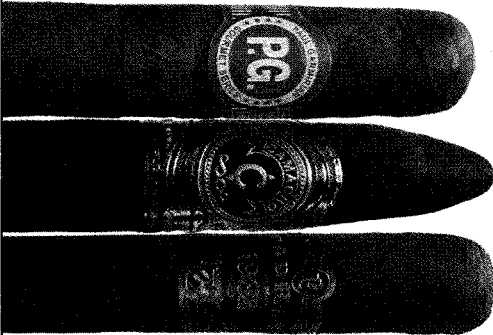
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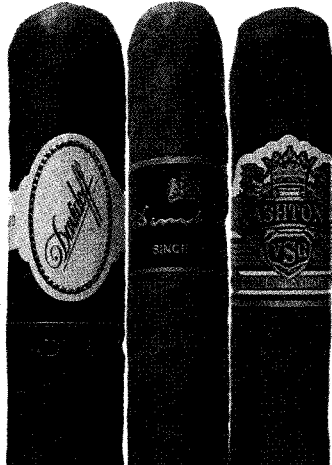
The Harry Potter series, feats of wizardry aside, is grounded in a desperate curiosity about the life of the English public school, which was a constant in the imaginative lives of middle- and working-class children in the Britain of J. K. Rowling's youth, and was also a central subject of the comics and novels produced for British children. Stephanie Meyer has re-created the sort of middle-class American youth in which it was unheard-of for a nice girl to be a sexual aggressor, and when the only coin of the realm for a boy who wanted to get lucky was romance and a carefully waged campaign intended to convince the girl that he was consumed by love for her.

Twilight is a 498-page novel about teenagers in which a cell phone appears only toward the very end, and as a minor plot contrivance. The kids don't have iPods; they don't text-message each other; they don't have MySpace pages or Facebook accounts. Bella does have a computer on which she dutifully e-mails her mother now and then, but the thing is so slow and dial-up that she almost never uses it, other than on the morning that she decides to punch the word *vampire* into her wood-burning search engine to learn a thing or two about her squeeze. But the world of the past is alive in other, more significant ways: Bella's friends, all in search of "boyfriends," spend weeks thinking about whom they will invite to a Sadie Hawkins dance. After a friend (toward whom Bella has gently been directing one of her own admirers) finally goes on a big "date" (a lost world right there, in a simple word), she phones Bella, breathless: "Mike kissed me! Can you believe it?" It was a scene that could have existed in any of the books I read when I was an adolescent; but in today's world of Y.A. fiction, it constitutes an almost bizarre moment. (Few things are as bewildering to contemporary parents as the sexual mores and practices of today's adolescents. We were prepared to give our children a "sex is a beautiful thing" lecture; they were prepared to have oral sex in the eighth grade.)

Think, for a moment, of the huge teen-girl books of the past decade. *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* is about female empowerment as it's



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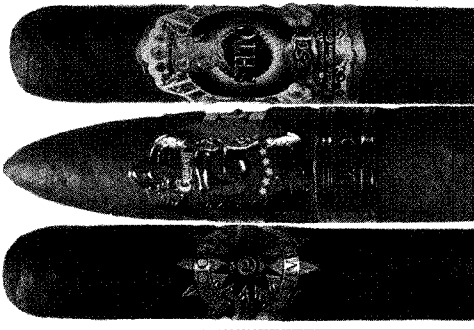
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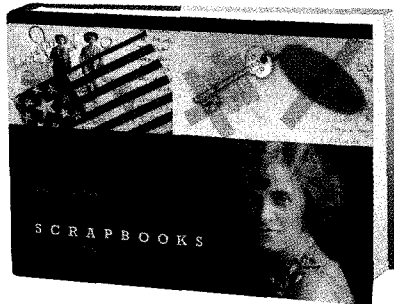
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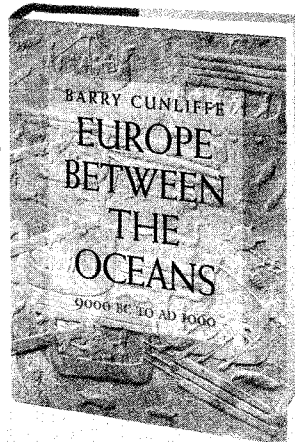


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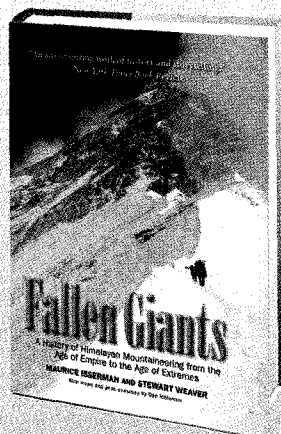
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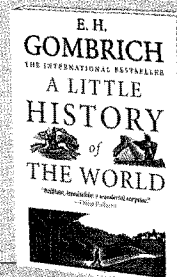


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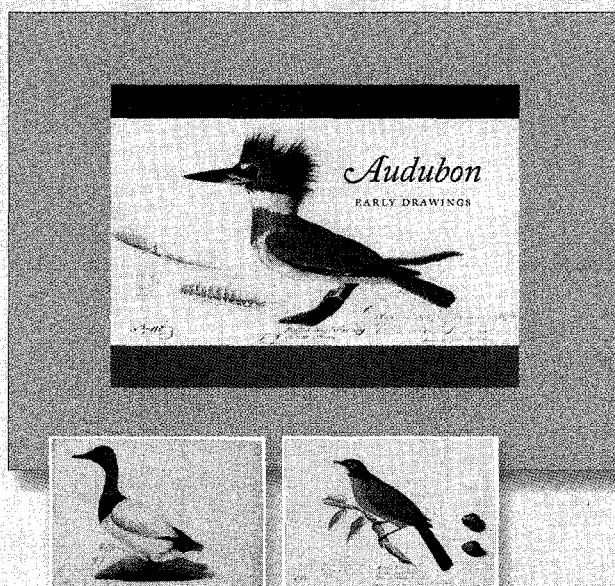
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currently defined by the kind of jaded, 40-something divorcees who wash ashore at day spas with their grizzled girlfriends and pollute the Quiet Room with their ceaseless cackling about the uselessness of men. They are women who have learned certain of life's lessons the hard way and think it kind to let young girls understand that the sooner they grasp the key to a happy life (which essentially boils down to a distaff version of "Bros before hos"), the better. In *Sisterhood*, four close friends might scatter for the summer—encountering everything from ill-advised sex with a soccer coach to the unpleasant discovery that Dad's getting remarried—but the most important thing, the only really important thing, is that the four reunite and that the friendships endure the vicissitudes of boys and romance. Someday, after all, they will be in their 50s, and who will be there for them—really there for them—then? The boy who long ago kissed their bare shoulders, or the raspy-voiced best friend, bleating out hilarious comments about her

puckered fanny from the next dressing room over at Eileen Fisher? *Gossip Girl*, another marketing sensation, replaces girls' old-fashioned need for male love and tenderness—these chippies could make a crack whore look like Clara Barton—with that for shopping and brand names. Notoriously set in an Upper East Side girls school that seems to combine elements of Nightingale-Bamford with those of a women's correctional facility after lights-out, the book gives us a cast of young girls whose desire for luxury goods (from Kate Spade purses to Ivy League-college admissions) is so nakedly hollow that the displacement of their true needs is pathetic. *Prep*—a real novel, not the result of a sales-team brainstorm—derives much of its pathos from the fact that the main character is never sure whether the boy she loves so much, and has had so many sexual encounters with, might actually constitute that magical, bygone character: her "boyfriend." The effect of *Prep* on teenagers is reminiscent of that of *The Catcher in the Rye*: both books describe that most rarefied of social worlds, the

East Coast boarding school, and yet young readers of every socioeconomic level have hailed them for revealing the true nature of their inner life. In *Prep*, the heroine wants something so fundamental to the emotional needs of girls that I find it almost heartbreaking: she wants to know that the boy she loves, and with whom she has shared her body, loves her and will put no other girl in her place.

Bella, despite all of her courage and competence, manages to end up in scrape after scrape: finding herself in the path of a runaway car, fainting at school, going shopping in a nearby city and getting cornered by a group of malevolent, taunting men. And over and over, out of nowhere, shoving the speeding car out of her way, or lifting her up in his arms, or scaring the bejesus out of the men who would harm her, is Edward. And at last, while she is recuperating from the near-rape, with a plate of ravioli in a café near the alley, he reveals all. Not since Maxim de Winter's shocking revelation—"You thought I loved Rebecca? ... I hated her"—has a



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Audubon EARLY DRAWINGS

INTRODUCTION BY RICHARD RHODES

SCIENTIFIC COMMENTARY BY SCOTT V. EDWARDS

FOREWORD BY LESLIE A. MORRIS

The drawings Audubon made from 1805-1815—sold to his friend and patron Edward Harris to help fund his masterwork *The Birds of America*, and now held by the Houghton Library and the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University—are published together here for the first time in large format and full color. In these 116 portraits of species collected in America and in Europe we see Audubon inventing his ingenious methods of posing and depicting his subjects, and we trace his development into a scientist and an artist who could proudly sign his artworks "drawn from Nature."

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sweet young heroine received such startling and enrapturing news. As he gradually explains, Edward has been avoiding and scorning Bella not because he loathes her but because he is so carnally attracted to her that he cannot trust himself to be around her for even a moment. The mere scent of her hair is powerful enough that he is in a constant struggle to avoid taking—and thereby destroying—her. This is a vampire novel, so it is a novel about sex, but no writer, from Bram Stoker on, has captured so precisely what sex and longing really mean to a young girl.

THE EROTIC RELATIONSHIP between Bella and Edward is what makes this book—and the series—so riveting to its female readers. There is no question about the exact nature of the physical act that looms over them. Either they will do it or they won't, and afterward everything will change for Bella, although not for Edward. Nor is the act one that might result in an equal giving and receiving of pleasure. If Edward fails—even once—in his great exercise in restraint, he will do what the boys in the old pregnancy-scare books did to their girlfriends: he will ruin her. More exactly, he will destroy her, ripping her away from the world of the living and bringing her into the realm of the undead. If a novel of today were to sound these chords so explicitly but in a nonsupernatural context, it would be seen (rightly) as a book about “abstinence,” and it would be handed out with the

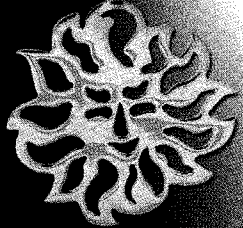
tracts and bumper stickers at the kind of evangelical churches that advocate the practice as a reasonable solution to the age-old problem of horny young people. (Because it takes three and a half very long books before Edward and Bella get it on—during a vampiric frenzy in which she gets beaten to a pulp, and discovers her Total Woman—and because Edward has had so many decades to work on his moves, the books constitute a thousand-page

treatise on the art of foreplay.) That the author is a practicing Mormon is a fact every reviewer has mentioned, although none knows what to do with it, and certainly none can relate it to the novel; even the supercreepy “compound” where the boring half of *Big Love* takes place doesn't have any vampires. But the attitude toward female sexuality—and toward the role of marriage and childbearing—expressed in these novels is entirely consistent with the teachings of that church. In the course of the four books, Bella will be repeatedly tempted—to have sex outside of marriage, to have an abortion as a young married woman, to abandon the responsibilities of a good and faithful mother—and each time, she makes the “right” decision. The series does not deploy these themes didactically or even moralistically. Clearly Meyer was more concerned with questions of romance and supernatural beings than with instructing young readers how to lead their lives. What is interesting is how deeply fascinated young girls, some of them extremely bright and ambitious, are by the questions the book poses, and by the solutions their heroine chooses.

Bella's fervent hope—one that will not be realized until the final novel—is that Edward will ravage her, and that they will be joined forever; the harrowing pain that is said to be the victim's lot at the time of consummation means nothing to her. She loves him and wants to make a gift to him of her physical body—an act fraught with ambiguous dangers (the *Twilight* series

so resonates with girls because it perfectly encapsulates the giddiness and the rapture—and the menace—that inherently accompany romance and sex for them). The ways in which his refusal and her insistence are accommodated are at the heart not only of this novel but of the entire series, and that inspires the rapture young girls feel for the books. This is not your seventh-grade human-development teacher passing around a dental dam

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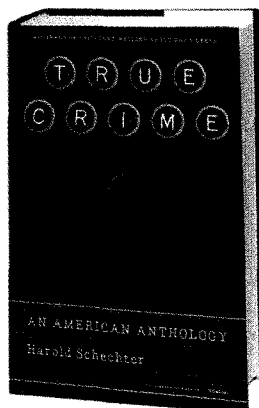
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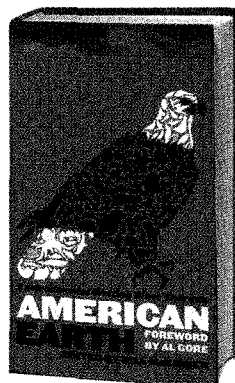
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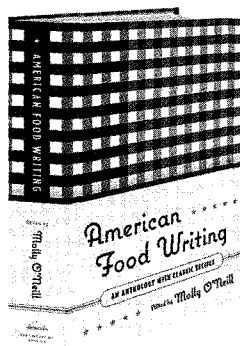
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and thereby making you want to send a plume of fifth-period taco salad and Gatorade into her outstretched palm. This is sex and romance fully—ecstatically, dangerously—engaged with each other. At last, at last.

AS I WRITE this, I am sitting on the guest-room bed of a close friend, and down the hall from me is the bedroom of the daughter of the house, a 12-year-old reader extraordinaire, a deep-sea diver of books. She was the fourth person through the doors of the Westwood Barnes & Noble the midnight that the series' final volume, *Breaking Dawn*, went on sale, and she read it—a doorstep, a behemoth—in six hours, and then turned back to page one as though it were the natural successor to the last page.

Posted on this girl's door—above the fading sticker of a cheery panda hopping over a pink jump rope, and one of a strawberry and a lollipop (their low placement suggesting the highest reach of a very small child), and to the right of an oval-shaped decal bearing the single, angry imperative STOP GLOBAL WARMING—is a small, black, square-shaped sticker that reads MY HEART BELONGS TO EDWARD. In the middle is a photograph of a pair of shapely female hands proffering a red Valentine heart. Also taped to this girl's closed door is a single piece of lined paper, on which she has written, in a carefully considered amalgam of block letters and swirly penmanship and eight different colors of crayon:

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THE PASSWORD

That she had made her declaration for Edward on such a pretty, handmade sign was all-girl—as was her decision to leave up the old stickers from her childhood. One of the signal differences between adolescent girls and boys is that while a boy quickly puts away childish things in his race to initiate a sexual life for himself, a girl will continue to cherish, almost to fetishize, the tokens of her little-girlhood. She wants to be both places at once—in the safety of girl land, with the pandas and jump ropes, and in the arms of a lover, whose sole desire is



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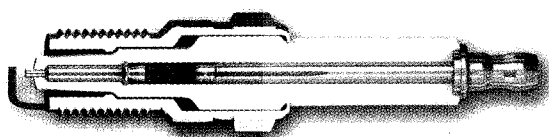
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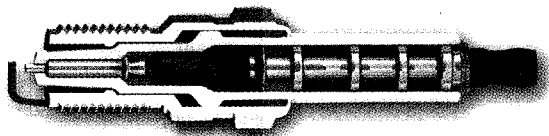
Actually, it's called a pulse plug—here's why its technology should be in your engine.

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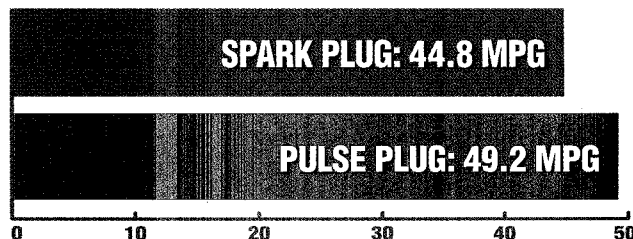
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to take her completely. And most of all, as girls work all of this out with considerable anguish, they want to be in their rooms, with the doors closed and the declarations posted. The biggest problem for parents of teenage girls is that they never know who is going to come barreling out of that sacred space: the adorable little girl who wants to cuddle, or the hard-eyed young woman who has left it all behind.

Years and years ago, when I was a young girl pressing myself into novels and baking my mother pretty birthday cakes, and writing down the 10 reasons I should be allowed to purchase and wear to the eighth-grade dance a pair of L'eggs panty hose, I knew that pass-word. But one night a few years after that dance, I walked into a bedroom at a party and saw something I shouldn't have, and a couple of months after that I unwisely accepted a ride to the beach from a boy I hardly knew, and then I was a college girl carrying a copy of Hartt's history of Renaissance art across campus and wondering whether I should take out a loan and go to graduate school, and somewhere along the way—not precisely on the day I got my first prescription for birth control, and not exactly on the afternoon I realized I had fallen out of love with one boy and had every right to take up with another—somewhere along the way, I lost the code. One day I was an intelligent girl who could pick up almost any bit of mass-market fiction that shed light on the mysteries of love and sex, and the practicalities by which one could merge the two, and read it with a matchless absorption. *Valley of the Dolls* had been so crucial in my life not because of its word to the wise about the inadvisability of mixing Seconal and Scotch, but for the three sentences that explained how to go about getting undressed before the first time you have sex: go into the bathroom, take your clothes off, and re-emerge with a towel wrapped around yourself. One day I was that girl, and one day I was not, and from then on, if you wanted to tempt me to read a bit of trash fiction, I was going to need more compelling information than that.

Midway through *Twilight*, after Edward and Bella have declared their feelings for one another, she emerges from a classroom with a pal, uncertain

whether she will eat lunch with Edward, or whether he will once again have vanished into the air, as he has a tendency to do. "But outside the door to our Spanish class, leaning against the wall—looking more like a Greek god than anyone had a right to—Edward was waiting for me."

It's a small moment in the book, but it lit aglow some tiny room of memory, if only for a maddening moment. I thought about how romantically charged high schools are for their young inmates. In 12th grade, I had a class next to the student parking lot. As I sat there one grayish day, I saw my boyfriend emerge from a side door of the massive school, along with half a dozen of his friends. They were clearly in the grip of some new plan, and they stood around their parked cars for a few minutes, talking. Where were they going, and why couldn't I go along?

The boy I was dating leaned against his car and listened to them, and he laughed, but then something happened—I could see he had changed his mind, and as the others drove away, he stood there for a while, looking after them, and then he pushed away from the car and disappeared back into school. Maybe, at long last, he was taking seriously his father's warnings that he might not graduate if he kept ditching school.

The bell rang, the room emptied—and there he was, in the hallway outside my class. "Let's ditch," he said.

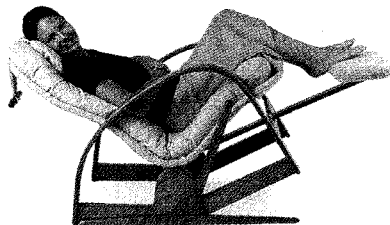
I was in worse academic shape than he was; my graduation and college admission depended on passing—as a senior!—my eighth-period geometry class (many trusted souls had assured me that I'd have a bright future, provided that I passed that damn course). And standing in front of me was a boy who had just abandoned his friends to spend the afternoon with me.

I can't remember a thing about geometry except the useless phrase *side-angle-side*, but for the rest of my life I'll remember the bottle of red wine we bought at a package store a mile from school, and the certainty (since proved) that in the scheme of things, I had made exactly the right decision. ■

Caitlin Flanagan is the author of *To Hell With All That* (2006). She is at work on *Girl Land*, a book about the emotional life of pubescent girls.

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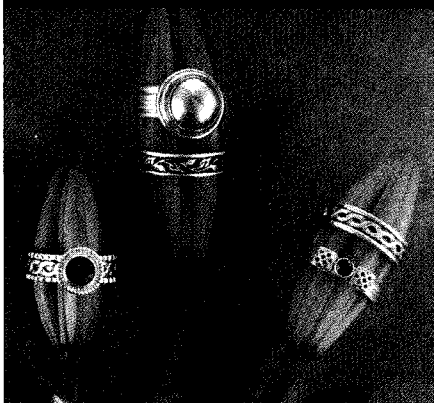
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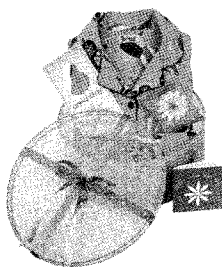
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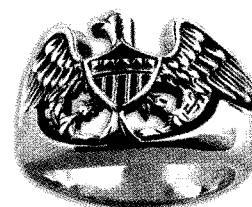
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Suburbs of Our Discontent

MISERY AND BANALITY IN A 1950S CONNECTICUT DEVELOPMENT—RENDERED WITH ANATOMICAL PRECISION ON THE PAGE, AND NOW COMING TO THE SCREEN

By Christopher Hitchens

THE THUMBNAIL SOCIAL history of the United States, as Godfrey Hodgson (the author of *America in Our Time*) once phrased it to me, is as follows: agrarian population moves as soon as it can to the cities, and then consummates the process by evacuating the cities for the suburbs. More Americans now live in the suburbs than anywhere else, and more do so by choice. Anachronisms of two kinds persist in respect of this phenomenon. The first is the apparently unshakable belief of political candidates that they will sound better, and appear

more authentic, if they can claim to come from a small town (something we were almost spared this year, until the chiller from Wasilla). The second is the continued stern disapproval of anything “suburban” by the strategic majority of our country’s intellectuals. The idiocy of rural life? If you must. The big city? All very well. Bohemia, or perhaps Paris or Prague? Yes indeed. The suburbs? No thank you.

The achievement of Richard Yates’s *Revolutionary Road* was to anatomize the ills and woes of suburbia while simultaneously satirizing those suburbanites and others who thought that

they themselves were too good for the ‘burbs. It is also the reason why the novel can seem, and in the literal sense is, dated. Published in 1961 and set in 1955, this psychodrama of an ambitiously named development in Connecticut (the source of Yates’s superbly misleading title) recalls us

to the period that saw the publication of David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), Sloan Wilson’s novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955), the pop sociology of men like William H. Whyte and Vance Packard, whose critiques *The Organization Man* (1956) and *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) made American

REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

By Richard Yates

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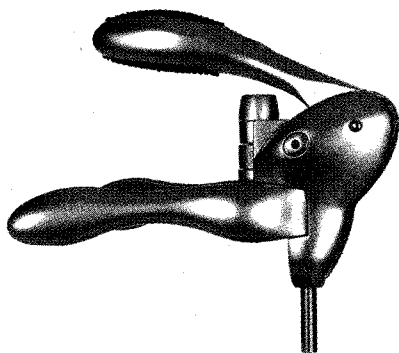
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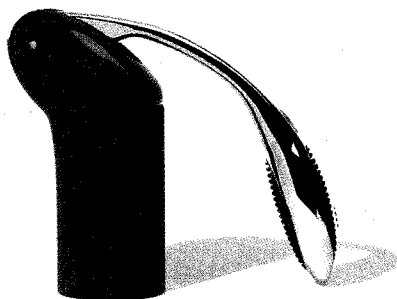
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business seem impersonal and cynical, and—if this isn't too fanciful—Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and Malvina Reynolds's song "Little Boxes," both of which made their debut in 1962. Pete Seeger had a huge success of his own with the song, which ridiculed the harmless citizens of Daly City, California, and gave us the word *ticky-tacky*. No less a man than Tom Lehrer was to say that it was "the most sanctimonious song ever written," but this insight would be buried by later developments in the '60s, when removal to the suburbs became a polite synonym for "white flight" (see the mythscape of Jeffrey Eugenides's *Detroit*). When Bertrand Russell published his first short-story collection, in 1953, there was something predictable in the fact that it was titled *Satan in the Suburbs and Other Stories*. Hollywood has since had considerable fun with that trope, and bids fair to do so again when *Revolutionary Road* comes to the screen, starring the *Titanic* duo of Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet.

Frank and April Wheeler are the reverse of the unhappy family in Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*. They have already tasted the fruits and sweets of the big city, and qualified as urban—perhaps better say urbane—sophisticates. But you know how it is. Pregnancy comes to April a teeny bit earlier than had been anticipated (or desired), and the distressing need to earn some actual money is then imposed upon Frank, who must martyr his aestheticism to the brute requirements of "the firm." Soon enough the days become regulated by the commute and, of course, by the needs of the children.

Even so, the lost Bohemia of their Greenwich Village period will not be denied, and before too long Frank and April are smilingly condescending to help out a local troupe called, with brilliant ominousness, the Laurel Players. They decide to build up the spirit of community theater with a production of *The Petrified Forest*. I shall simply say

that I don't remember ever feeling so sorry for a set of fictional characters. If Yates had one talent above all, it was for conveying the feeling of disappointment and anticlimax, heavily infused with the sort of embarrassment that amounts to humiliation. As the full horror of the

first night, and the full catastrophe of April's own performance, become apparent, Yates catches the ghastly moment by writing, "The virus of calamity, dormant and threatening all these weeks, had erupted now."

The many phony and bogus ways in which people conceal such moments of truth from themselves and from each other give Yates his unceasing opportunities to cre-

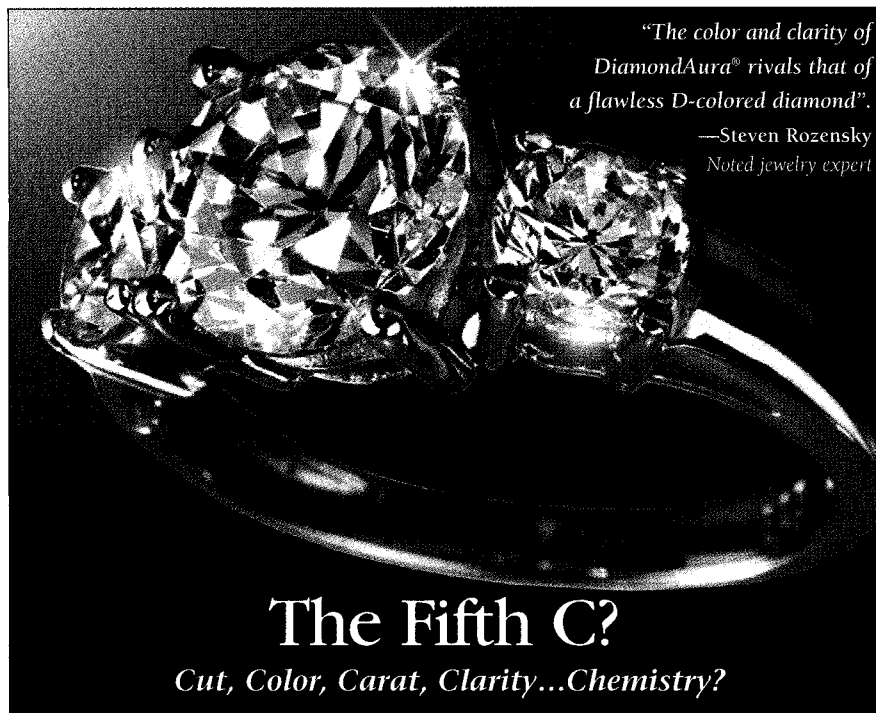
ate scenes of excruciating misery. How can people bear to suffer so much, one keeps wanting to ask, when no great cause is at stake? Here is the start of an evening of stupefying banality featuring the Wheelers and their most habitual friends, the Campbells:

"Hi!" They called to one another.
"Hi! ..." "Hi! ..."

This one glad syllable, borne up through the gathering twilight and redoubling back from the Wheelers' kitchen door, was the traditional herald of an evening's entertainment. Then came the handshakings, the stately puckered kissings, the sighs of amiable exhaustion—"Ah-h-h"; "Who-o-o"—suggesting that miles of hot sand had been traveled for the finding of this oasis.

And the whole gruesome soiree has yet to be endured! Yates spares us nothing of the boredom and futility and buried hostility that result. It's clear that he's no fan either of this smug housing development or of the new forms of capitalism on behalf of which its male inhabitants make their daily dash to the train. Frank's boss is a droning old booster who talks like this:

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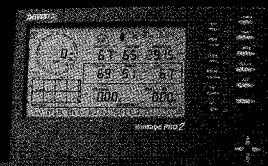
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Frank, a lot of people tend to look down on plain old-fashioned selling today, but I want to tell you something ..."

A lesser writer might hold it right there, but Yates goes on to make us feel as hypnotized with boredom as Frank is, trapped at lunch with this martini-soaked Babbitt who furnishes him with a living (and who, by the way, has guessed right about the technological future).

Riesman made the suburbs the prime locale of those who sacrificed their "inner-directed" opportunities in order to be "other-directed" by the prevailing manners and mores of their community. Yates plays a little with this distinction, just as he subjects Frank to alienation (at work) and to anomie (at home). The Wheelers and their friends consider themselves to be *in* but not thereby of the suburbs. They want it both ways: the comfort to start off, and then the additional luxury of looking down on their intellectually inferior neighbors. And at least at the beginning, they are able to manage this:

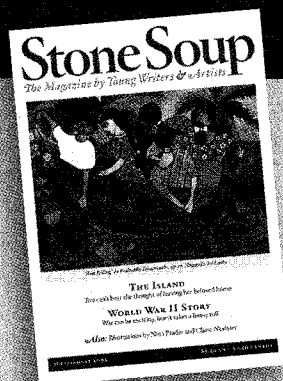
"How do you *like* this Oppenheimer business?" one of them would demand, and the others would fight for the floor with revolutionary zeal. The cancerous growth of Senator McCarthy had poisoned the United States, and with the pouring of second or third drinks they could begin to see themselves as members of an embattled, dwindling intellectual underground ... Frank might talk wistfully of Europe—"God, I wish we'd taken off and gone there when we had the chance"—and this might lead to a quick general lust for expatriation: "Let's all go!" ...

And even after politics had palled there had still been the elusive but endlessly absorbing subject of Conformity, or The Suburbs, or Madison Avenue, or American Society Today.

And yet their dull and Ike-loving neighbors considerably and generously turn out for the Laurel Players, only to find that the culturally superior aren't as superior as all that. To deadly effect, Yates uses the term *revolutionary* above in such a way as to make it sound at least as hollow and pretentious as in its employment for the name of a sylvan road.

Haven't we all heard some irritating person saying that if so-and-so is elected,

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Q. What advantages does infrared quartz tube heating source have over other heating source products?

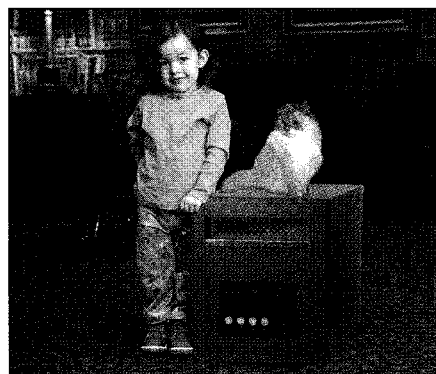
A. John Jones designed his heating source around the three most important consumer benefits: economy, comfort, and safety.

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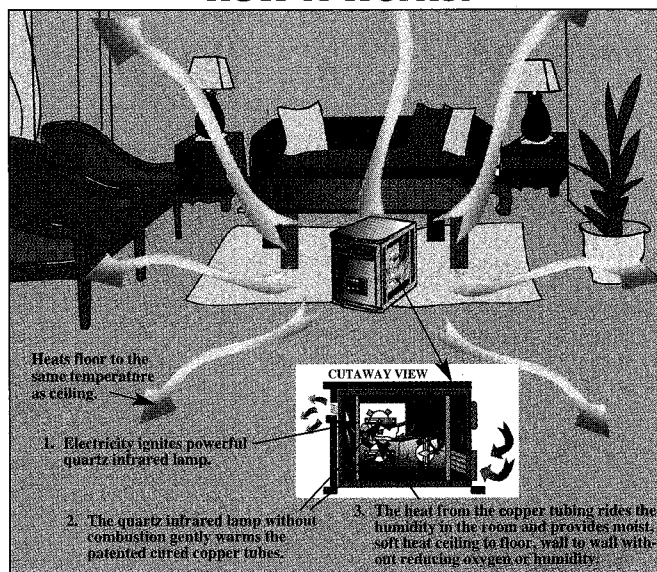
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End of interview.

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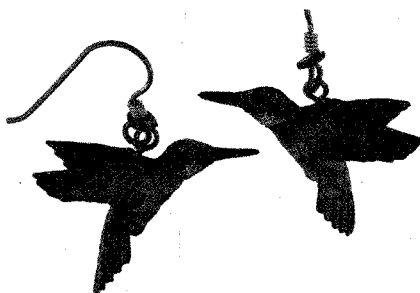


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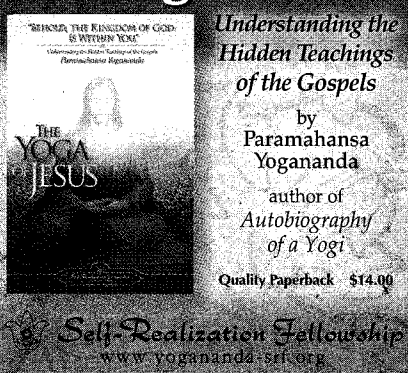
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then he/she is absolutely definitely leaving the country? There must be some reason why it is mainly liberals who tend to say this (I knew the late Mary Lee Settle, fictional chronicler of West Virginia, who *did* emigrate for a time after the election of Richard Nixon), but the chief thing to note about the promise is that it is usually an empty one. However, after the calamity of *The Petrified Forest*, April really does decide to pull up stakes and start again, this time in Paris. This initiative on her part is what eventually enables her to see that her husband is no sort of rebel or nonconformist, but instead a mediocre coward.

The proposed move is so central to the action of the book that one regrets to find it so unconvincing. April is supposed to work for NATO headquarters while Frank "finds himself." One can perhaps imagine him going along with the idea for a bit—he is almost volitionless for much of the time—but it's somewhat more difficult to picture her believing in the scheme in the first place, let alone involving her children in it. Ah, those children. They try so hard to please their parents and even harder to understand them, and their resulting wretchedness is one of the most haunting subplots of the novel.

As things decompose, and as the prospect of a new start in France begins to recede and then to vanish, the other celebrated suburban sport, adultery, becomes the only untried distraction or escape. It is duly tried, and Yates makes certain that his characters extract everything from infidelity that they might have expected, with the sole exception of sexual pleasure. Again, his gift for depicting bathos and degradation is to the fore. Here for example is the cheery local joint (on Route 12) where assignations may be fueled by alcohol, and music supplied "For Your Dancing Pleasure":

Piano, bass, tenor sax and drums, they prided themselves on versatility. They could play anything, in any style you wanted to name, and to judge from the delight that swam in their eyes they had no idea of what inferior musicians they were.

Revolutionary Road is replete with moments like that, conveying with great economy the experience of boredom

and disgust. "Oh, now, don't be silly," says Shep Campbell to his "aimless and pathetic" wife, "allowing his voice to grow heavy and rich with common sense." He later comes upon her in the kitchen, "spreading some kind of meat paste on crackers, licking her fingers as she worked."

In this microcosmic hell on Earth, there is always a lower circle. Yates shows us the schizophrenic son of the local realtor, on an outing from his asylum, and causes us to feel both the exquisite pain of madness and the unbearable toll that it exacts on the sane. To give you another sketch of the stupendous way in which Yates could both observe and write, here is how a crazy person smokes:

Lagging behind his parents, he stood with his feet planted wide apart on the wet gravel, slightly pigeon-toed, and gave himself wholly to the business of lighting a cigarette—tamping it methodically on his thumbnail, inspecting it with a frown, fixing it carefully in his lips, hunching and cupping the match to it, and then taking the first deep pulls as intently as if the smoke of this particular cigarette were all he would ever have or expect of sensual gratification.

Awarded the role of idiot savant, the boy speaks the crude and truthful lines that dissolve the Wheeler marriage. And that denouement suddenly seems foredoomed. I close with one more example of Yates's power, and one criticism of it:

The Revolutionary Hill Estates had not been designed to accommodate a tragedy. Even at night, as if on purpose, the development held no looming shadows and no gaunt silhouettes. It was invincibly cheerful, a toyland of white and pastel houses whose bright, uncurtained windows winked blandly through a dappling of green and yellow leaves ... A man running down these streets in desperate grief was indecently out of place.

Again one admires the cadence, even while pausing and pulling up slightly in order to inquire of oneself how it came to be so widely accepted that there is something quiet about desperation. ■

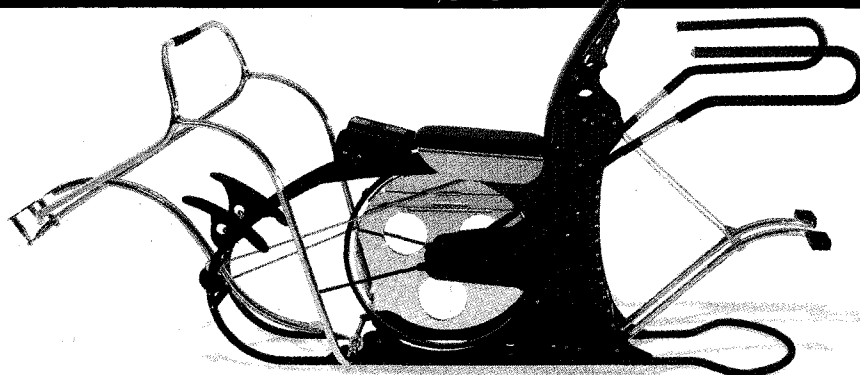
Christopher Hitchens is an Atlantic contributing editor and a Vanity Fair columnist.

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Using a clinical pickaxe to scale sharp sociological heights, Schneider, a historian with a fetish for outré urban doings, locates and explores a provocative nexus of truth and transgression: the place where urban myth, violent crime, medical findings, drug trafficking, media conflation, and policy prerogative overlap and intersect. As one might expect, he fares best when humanizing and personifying the scourge and its chronologically shifting discontents, worst when permitting trend-tracking and stat-mongering to seep to the fore. The sober, somber epilogue proffers cool plausibilities—sensible alleviations premised on those rare qualities, basic political will and common sense.

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Annie J. Randall

OXFORD

The sultry voice, the midnight mascara, the sexual ambiguity—Swinging London's semiotic pastiche had as its blond-and-beehived figurehead a former convent girl named Mary Isabel Catherine Bernadette O'Brien, aka Dusty Springfield. Between 1963 and 1970, the "White Queen of Soul" scored 18 hit singles, became a fixture on English

television, and built an unlikely bridge from Motown to Merseyside. At the height of her popularity—built on an affinity for "black" music, an embrace by the mod faithful, and a camp sensibility—she transcended the British Invasion and some of its postcolonial trappings, though questions about identity and cries of cultural appropriation (owing partly to her long collaboration with the American gospel singer Madeline Bell) dogged her always. Much has been written about Springfield's life, but too little about her artistry and panache. Randall begins to remedy that with her stylish, deeply researched analysis of an epochal look and an era-defining sound.

Here at the End of the World We Learn to Dance

Lloyd Jones

DIAL

The dance that energizes this beautiful little novel (published here for the first time, although it was released in New Zealand in 2001) is the tango, which, in addition to serving a symbolic function, drives much of the action. The terpsichorean magic casts its spell not only in its native Argentina but also in far-away New Zealand, a prim little society where it has a different but even more powerful appeal during the First World War, when pacifism and xenophobia

collide with the prevailing British Empire patriotism. For the characters who decamp from there to South America and for their descendants who later make the return trip, the tango is a leitmotif. As the plot jumps back and forth through many decades between the two contrasting nations, Jones proves himself as skilled at evoking exotic Buenos Aires as he is at exploring his native New Zealand. As in his Booker-nominated novel, *Mister Pip*, this least parochial of novelists is adept here at picturing what happens when diverse cultures encounter one another.

The Triumph of Music: The Rise of Composers, Musicians and Their Art

Tim Blanning

HARVARD

Despite its deadening title, this is a provocative and amusing book. Blanning describes not the triumph of *good* music but the development of Western music generally, from an aristocratic court frill to a powerful social force. Toward the end, he points out that "Tsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie Yellow Polka Dot Bikini" is after 48 years, in all its banality, familiar to almost everyone. To Blanning this illustrates the pervasiveness that has brought music to supremacy among the arts. That's hardly a revolutionary thesis, but it develops surprisingly as he pursues it through a wealth of historical anecdote. He contrasts, for instance, Wagner's austere Bayreuth Festspielhaus with its French contemporary, the decadently ornate Paris Opera—"two ways of elevating music." This work is clearly an outgrowth of Blanning's equally intelligent study, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660-1789* (2002).

Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat

John Lukacs

BASIC

One of Churchill's shortest speeches, given to the House of Commons three days after he became prime minister, the grim but stirring peroration ("I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat ...") wasn't broadcast to the nation. But it came to epitomize

Churchill's defiance and his role in galvanizing his countrymen. This brief but deep book, enormously detailed about the speech, its background, and its iconography, gives us the measure of the man. Often clumsy (Lukacs has never overcome his middle-European prose style), sometimes simplistically argued, the book is nevertheless an achievement of history through synecdoche: by shining a light in this corner, the author shows an essential figure at a truly pivotal point in history.

The Bolsheviks in Power

Alexander Rabinowitch

INDIANA

Based on extensive research in newly released Russian archives, this briskly written, often riveting study of the evolution of Bolshevik authoritarianism, just issued in paperback, provides a salutary corrective to the school of historiography that views Soviet Communism as totalitarian by nature. Rabinowitch, a distinguished scholar of Russian history, marshals a wealth of evidence that the elimination of democratic elements from the newborn system came about haphazardly in a chaotic period beset by crises on every front. Compelling as this argument is, it won't entirely persuade those who believe that the split in the Second International and subsequent evolution of Marxism-Leninism—due in no small part to Lenin's particular convictions and nature—made authoritarian government inevitable in Russia after the October Revolution.

Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce

Sarah Abrevaya Stein

YALE

Assorted histories—world, fashion, economic, Jewish—converge in this fluent account of an esoteric trade and its far-flung principals. From the “feather boom” of the 1880s, when urbane Western women began clamoring for the exotic accessory, till the First World War—concurrent “bust,” when the hat ornamentation fell quickly from vogue, a niche of lavishness formed and thrived. Stein, a University of

Washington history professor, brings this ephemeral luxury market into focus, acquainting the reader with its diasporic, generally Yiddish-speaking middlemen and -women: feather handlers in South Africa, manufacturers in England, families of importers in the Mediterranean, farmers in the western United States. To her credit, the mix of religion, colonialism, persecution, and plumage never becomes dizzying. Nor does the style stray: Stein eschews both portentousness and glibness in telling a “story of unimagined global connections,” one in which there is no distinction “between the fundamental and the frivolous, between things historically weighty and those light as a feather.”

The Thing Itself:

On the Search for Authenticity

Richard Todd

RIVERHEAD

Underscoring one's own wide-ranging observations with sly references to self-aware aphorists—Thoreau, Pierre Bourdieu, Andy Warhol—may seem a *recherché* gambit hardly worth the hazard. Yet by foreword's end, the reader knows that all is well. Why? That underscoring observer is Richard Todd, a longtime cultural critic with Montaigne-like tendencies toward gently acerbic discursion. Owing certain stylistic, spiritual, and topical allegiances to Joseph Epstein's bravura *Snobbery*, Todd takes ruminative stock of his life and the paradoxes inherent in various external matters: celebrity, antiquity, politics, travel, brand names, spare parts, modern art. Along the way, our apprehension-obsessed Virgil offers object lessons aplenty—how poignancy emerges most clearly when it's least forced, say, or why a well-Windexed personal prism is still our best refractor of the universal. As important, he pillories only those who truly deserve it (which, given the candor, often means a reflexive sacking). All of this reinforces the reliability of the narrator, an insightful humanist who concludes, “We need to be better materialists.” If that means more books like this one, then indeed we do. ■

IN A WORD

By Barbara Wallraff

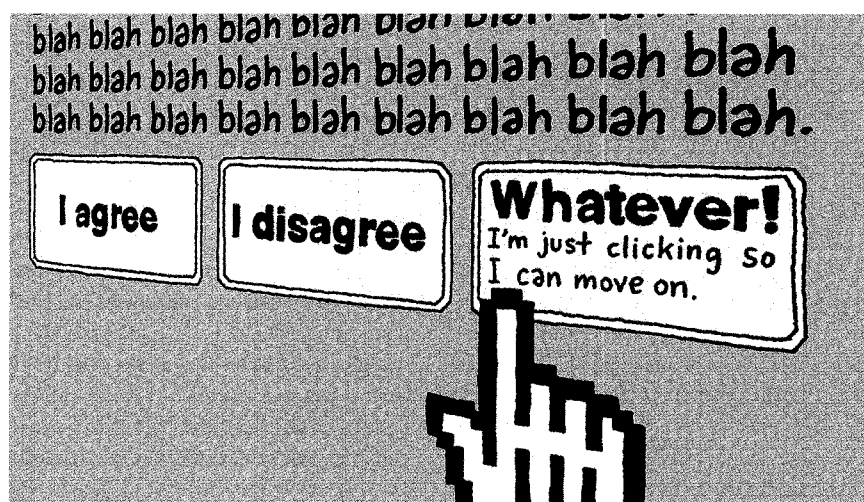
I AGREE." IT'S a simple statement, but what elicits it is often quite the opposite. If you spend any time online, you know the drill: when you first visit certain Web sites or when a software update is ready, a pop-up full of fine print appears, requiring you to scroll to the bottom and click on "I agree" to proceed.

That fine print tends to be lengthy and one-sided: "Under no circumstances, including, but not limited to, negligence, shall we be liable for any special or consequential damages." That's common boilerplate. The wording can also be weirdly specific: "Not intended for use in the operation of nuclear facilities, aircraft navigation or communication systems, air traffic control systems ..." That's from a recent iTunes update.

From the standpoint of psychology, these elaborate warnings and prohibitions are misguided. For instance, doesn't telling me I "may not modify, copy, reproduce, republish, upload, post, transmit, translate, sell, create derivative works, exploit, or distribute in any manner or medium (including by e-mail or other electronic means) any material" from a Web site beg me to cut and paste and then defiantly assert that I was quoting, rather than any of the above? I imagine that any nuclear engineers reading this are already trying to figure out how they can use iTunes in their work.

The wording of user agreements isn't even desirable from a legal standpoint. Today's fine legal minds tend to favor plain English. The lawyer and author Bryan A. Garner writes, in *Garner's Modern American Usage*, "Unnecessarily complex legal jargon—or 'legalese'—is widely viewed by legal scholars as the source of many problems." He goes on to say, "It doesn't communicate efficiently, even to other lawyers." Hear, hear!

Online user agreements tend to be legally enforceable to the extent that



they're "commercially reasonable," Herbert Hammond, a Dallas intellectual-property lawyer, recently explained to me. That means what it sounds like—for instance, not insisting, as PayPal did until a few years ago, that users can't sue you but must submit disputes to arbitration in Santa Clara County, California. By the same token, judges expect Internet users to be reasonable too.

So if both providers and users of online services are required to be reasonable, why do we need all the irritating blabbity-blab in user agreements? Boiled down to plain English, what the agreements say is scarcely more than "Let's be reasonable." To which I, for one, would gladly respond, "I agree."

WORD FUGITIVES

A reader recently requested a term for the "irresistible impulse" to rearrange the dishes in a dishwasher that someone else has loaded. According to zillions of readers, that's *obsessive compulsive dishorder*. Another zillion, give or take, pegged it as *redishtribution*—or *dishorderly conduct*, *redishtricting*, *dishrespect*, or *dish jockeying*.

Various individualists were, um, dishinclined to pursue that line of

thought. These include Ben Smythe, of Idyllwild, Calif., and Claire Stratford, of Tupper Lake, N.Y., both of whom suggested *mearranging*; and George Yezukevich, of South Weymouth, Mass., and Henry Beer, of Boulder, Colo., who both came up with *onecupsmanship*.

Marlaine Lockheed, of Princeton, N.J., sent in an exclamation instead of a noun as requested. But still, Lockheed earns top honors for *Hi-ho, Silverware! It's the Load Arranger!*

NOW MICHAEL MUSLIN, of Chicago, writes, "After my girlfriend observed that train commuters with wheeled briefcases navigate their rolling offices without regard for anyone else, I realized I needed a word to describe an object that indicates the user to be a jerk. Cell phones are no longer this type of object, due to their ubiquity—but they used to be." ■

Visit Barbara Wallraff's blog, at barbarawallraff.theatlantic.com, where you'll find more commentary on language and a place to submit word fugitives and words that meet Michael Muslin's need. Submissions become the property of Word Fugitives and may be edited. Readers whose queries are published and those who take top honors will receive an autographed copy of Wallraff's most recent book, *Word Fugitives*.

PETER ARKLE

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WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?

By Jeffrey Goldberg



I couldn't help but notice that you've started an advice column, so maybe you can help me. I, too, write an advice column, for a prominent online magazine, and every day I get letters from people desperate for answers to life's grinding problems: husbands addicted to porn; boyfriends who won't brush their teeth; mothers-in-law who refuse to address their daughters-in-law by name; etc. So, Mr. Big Shot Advice Maven, tell me quick what instructions I should give these tormented souls—I've got a column to write. Also, why are men terrified of dishwashers?

*Prudence
Washington, D.C.*

Dear Prudence,
Men are terrified of dishwashers because dishwashers cause impotence. To answer your other questions: it's not the addiction that's the problem, it's forgetting to clear the computer's search history that causes trouble; your boyfriend is a vegan and doesn't want to harm any of the bacteria in his mouth; and isn't not addressing you by name better than calling you "the tramp who ruined my son's life"? If I can be of further help, please do let me know.

If your company adopts a business-casual dress code, is it okay to wear Hawaiian or tropical-print shirts during working hours?

*Milford Prewitt
New York, N.Y.*

Dear Milford,
Hawaiian shirts fell out of favor shortly after CBS canceled *Magnum, P.I.* Also mustaches. Some men, however, do still wear so-called Aloha shirts. Rick Warren, the pastor of California's Saddleback megachurch, was the most famous, but he recently informed me that he has stopped wearing them. "About three years ago I noticed that journalists were always referring to them, like it was a big strategy or fashion statement, so I threw them all out." Warren reports that, in the 15 years he wore Hawaiian shirts, "they went in and out of style four times." They are currently out. Steer clear.

Is it appropriate to text-message condolences?

*Brianna Snyder
Springfield, Mass.*

Dear Brianna,
I'm new to the advice racket, but it seems to me that this is an example of a question to which you already know the answer. One doesn't have to be Miss Manners to believe that the only proper ways to extend condolences are in person or in a handwritten note.

How do you remove the tobacco smell from books?

*Chris Markham
Bloomfield, N.J.*

Dear Chris,
Place kitty litter in a deep plastic container and cover with an unprinted paper towel. Place the offending book,

upright and open, atop the paper towel, and close the container. Then wait. How long you wait depends on the degree of smoke saturation.

When is the right moment for first-time buyers to purchase a home to live in?

*Mitesh Desai
Atlanta, Ga.*

Dear Mitesh,
I prefer investing in assets more portable than real estate, such as collateralized debt obligations and soda cans. But a smart and wealthy man who serves on this column's panel of advisers reports that the proper answer is "Right now." That is, if you can find someone to lend you money. My adviser further reports that a "brilliant and venal man" once instructed him to buy a home he couldn't quite afford. "You'll spend the first two years trying to get on top of the payments and the rest of your life glad you overreached," was the venal man's advice. My adviser also reports that this man died "old, rich, and utterly alone."

Is medical school more difficult in the U.S. or in France?

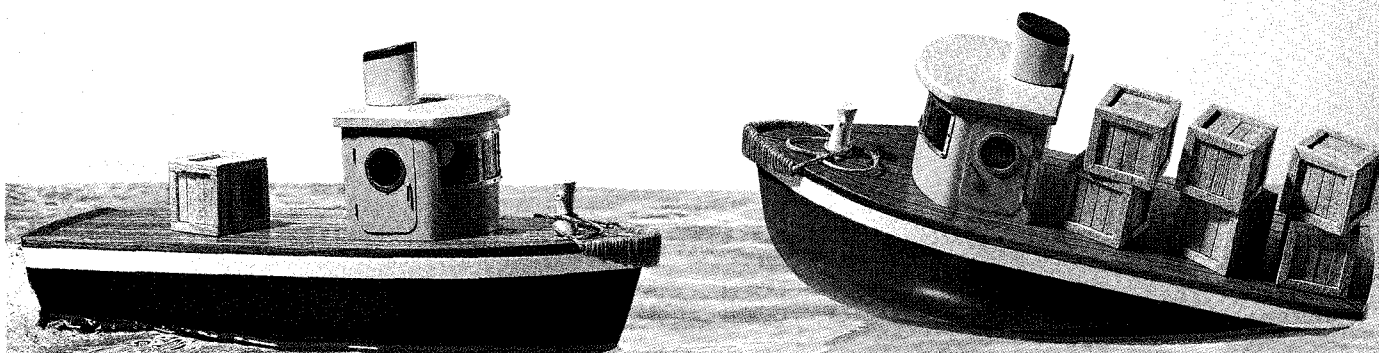
*M. Bergman
Bangkok, Thailand*

Dear M.,
France. Because it's in French. ■

To submit your question or request for advice, please e-mail advice@theatlantic.com. Include your full name and address.

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